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Chaucer

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POETRY & LIFE

CHAUCER & HIS POETRY

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GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital ; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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CHAUCER & HIS POETRY

THE literature of the Middle Ages, though it is by no means lacking in interest, has not attracted, and does not attract, a very wide attention outside the circle of special students. This neglect is natural enough, when we reflect upon the nature of the literary environment of mediæval Europe. The writer had two channels only for the outlet of his art, the one feudal, the other monastic. The gaiety of the chivalrous courts gave birth to the songs of the troubadours and the diffuse tales of the romancers ; from the theology of the cloister emerged the disputations of scholastic dialecticians and the homilies, sad or satirical, of pious anchorites. This mediæval atmosphere in both its manifestations has vanished, and the human spirit cannot be expected to return to it again. For it was essentially unprogressive, a fashion whose roots did not strike to the permanent deeps of human nature. It produced no elements fit to create new life in the future. It was narrow, and only occasionally intense ; flippant or solemn, as the case may be, without being genuine or truly serious. To study mediæval literature is like visiting a dusty museum tinged with a few streaks of forlorn sunlight. We should certainly learn something ; but most of it we should feel to be quite

out of touch with life as we know it. And in order that its meaning should be only partially apprehended by us, we should be compelled to approach it with a great apparatus of historical or antiquarian lore. Even with this assistance we should find monotony, stagnation of ideal, absence of individual initiative, devotion to the forms rather than to the substance of life, to be the characteristic and prevalent tones in the literature of mediæval Europe. It is in sharp and happy contrast to this spirit that the work of Chaucer shines across the fourteenth century. He was by no means insensitive to the claims of the Court and of the Church, and so far his work partook of the general tone ; but, in addition to that, he was a man, an Englishman, individual and very human : through this individuality he became a great poet.

The long sleep of the Dark Ages had been broken, however, before Chaucer's time. A greater than he had awakened the echoes of the grand style in Italy ; from Dante (1265–1321) Chaucer was to learn the dignity of the poet's calling, to find the true poetic spirit. Along with Petrarch and Boccaccio, Dante gave him that foretaste of the Renaissance which is to be perceived in the human interest of the "Canterbury Tales." From France too the stream of this influence came to Chaucer, more violently if less clearly, through the "Roman de la Rose," which inspired so much of Chaucer's early work. But the influences would have counted for

nothing without his genius. After his death English poetry slipped back into sterile imitativeness for nearly two centuries. Lydgate, Hoccleve, Henryson, and the rest can be little more than names to modern readers, while Chaucer, their master, is rich in perennial delight and can be read, but for his language, with as much aptness to our present conditions as Tennyson can. He is modern, as Homer is modern, in his sympathetic touching of the fundamental chords of human nature. To the student of mediæval literature his work is like a lively inn unexpectedly discovered in a benighted wilderness; the mere reader of poetry will find it no less jolly, no less refreshing.

Considered in relation to English literature alone, Chaucer is an even more isolated figure, so conspicuously and apparently without antecedents that the title 'father of English poetry' seems the natural description of his position. Old English alliterative verse, tolerable in a hoary monument of a rude antiquity like "Beowulf," is easily slighted as a barbarism when we read it by the side of Chaucer's artistic diction. It is evident that the Anglo-Saxon scheme of poetic language did not contain the key to true poetry. It stood for a lower stage of culture; it served the rude needs of the untrained Anglo-Saxon ear, but could not be tuned to the finer melodies of the French love-song. Alliteration is a crude contrivance for satisfying a musical ear; the rimes of the French poets were a far more delicate device.

Now, the period in which Chaucer lived, three centuries after the Norman Conquest, was one of great importance to the English language. The people as a whole had held fast to their native tongue, rejecting the Norman-French of their rulers. On the other hand, this French was still the fashionable language at Court. Poems were written in French by Englishmen like John Gower; Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III, particularly encouraged this fashion —one of her suite, we may mention, was the famous Jean Froissart—and no man could claim to belong to cultured circles who was not proficient in the favourite language. Yet English had so far triumphed as to have become the native tongue; it had become the language of proclamations, of the law-courts, and of common intercourse among all classes. But this English language, especially round and about London, had been profoundly modified by the French that was so freely spoken by the educated. And clearly it is this modified English that should have been regarded as the national language; in this language a literature in which French habits of thought are to be grafted on to an English stock must obviously be expressed. That was Chaucer's achievement. The basis of his work, as of his language, is English; but it is English infused with the freedom, the grace, and the accomplishments of the French.

If we compare Chaucer's work with "Piers Plowman," the famous poem of his contem-

porary, William Langland, we shall at once realize the advantages as well as the greatness of Chaucer's diction and method. "Piers Plowman" represents the best that could be accomplished in the old alliterative style. Its author had many fine qualities—imagination, vigour, sincerity; his skill in portraiture was akin to Chaucer's own, his power in allegory considerable; his faculty for striking out a telling phrase was genuine, and he was aided by the driving force of a powerful moral purpose. With all this, his poem is difficult to read even when the necessary linguistic knowledge is forthcoming. It is of fossil interest mainly—a valuable specimen for our mediæval museum. It represents the end of a tradition. Langland was endeavouring to revive the ashes of a burnt-out fire, while Chaucer with surer instinct and more mundane purpose was following the gleam of the future. Langland found in his stunted language neither beauty nor melody; Chaucer, more interested in life and poetry as such, made beauty and melody the guiding principles of his work, and thus came to make use of French forms and became the pioneer of the metrical principles which have survived in our poetry to this day. The difference may readily be perceived by a study of the two following examples.

The first is from "Piers Plowman." It will be observed that no principle of metrical scansion can be followed, except that the accents in the lines fall generally on the alliterated letters

and that only by this mechanical trick are the two halves of each line connected. The jigging irregular rhythm very rapidly palls on the ear.

> In a *s*omer *s*eson · whan *s*oft was the *s*onnė,
> I *sh*opė me in *sh*roudės · as I a *she*pė werė,
> In *h*abite as an *h*eremite · un*h*oly of workės,
> Went *w*yde in this *w*orld · *w*ondrės to herė.

The second example is from the Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales," and in this case it will be seen that the lines fall readily into iambic *feet*, with the accent recurring regularly.

> Of small corál aboute hire arm she bar
> A paire of bedės gauded al with grenė,
> And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheenė
> On which ther was first write a crownėd A,
> And after *Amor vincit omnia.*

Each of these five lines, when the words are read with Chaucer's accentuation and pronunciation, scans as readily into its five iambic feet as five lines of Tennyson's "Idylls"; the lines rime truly in pairs; and they move smoothly and gracefully, where Langland's merely hobble. The difference between the two poets is indeed the great gulf which lies between the inartistic and the artistic in literature. The unknown poet of "The Pearl" alone had achieved anything comparable with Chaucer's work. Even if we had his second-rate poems only, Chaucer would have to be treated with the utmost respect as the pioneer

of the true style in English poetry. But his best work does not need this adventitious title to our consideration; both in form and in substance it stands close to the best that we have. It is indeed doubtful whether any narrative poems in English literature surpass the choicest of the "Canterbury Tales."

Chaucer used the best poetic methods available for his purposes in that masterly way which arises from what we call genius. He imitated the forms, borrowed the materials, learned the secrets of the best writers of his century, but he gave all his work the unmistakable impress of his strong idiosyncrasy. He is the representative poet of the England of the fourteenth century, but he is also one of England's representative poets of all time. He was responsive to the touch of the Time-Spirit, but he was not limited by it. His work arouses our interest and admiration, not as a historical favour, but on its intrinsic merits. We wish to insist on this from the outset. No more human poet than Chaucer has survived to us. Hence the necessary effort should be made to overcome the difficulties of his language. Those difficulties are not serious, and the reward is more than sufficient to atone for the trouble of surmounting them. Let us enumerate the chief of them.

(1) Certain words found in Chaucer are obsolete. The difficulty from this source is also met with in Shakespeare, and an appeal to the glossary has of course to be made for them.

The words are either survivals of older English, or French words which have failed to impress themselves permanently upon the language. They are frequently quite interesting words from an etymological standpoint. Thus in the first twenty lines of the "Canterbury Tales" we meet the obsolete *kowthe*, which the glossary will define to mean *known*, and we may thereby be reminded that it survives in the modern word *uncouth* with a modified sense. And again the word *halwes* (= holy places) throws light on the connexion between the forms *holy* and *hallow*. This interest should be stimulated, because it often enables the reader of Chaucer to dispense with his glossary.

(2) Many words of French origin are used in their original sense and with their native pronunciation. This latter point is very important in its relation to Chaucer's rhythm. Thus in the passage previously referred to the words *licour*, *vertu*, *Nature*, *corages* must be treated as French words with the accent on their second syllables. If they are not so treated, justice cannot be done to Chaucer's metrical smoothness, and one of the great pleasures of his verse will be lost. Rarely do we find that these words are accented as in modern English, and it is probable that all of them were pronounced by Chaucer in the French fashion, just as we do *depot*, *ennui*, *chassis*, and many other words of recent importation.

(3) Special attention must be paid to the final syllables *-e*, *-es*, *-en*, *-ed*, *-eth*, because they

represent grammatical inflexions which retained their force in Chaucer's day. The Old English language had been elaborately and variously inflected; but the natural processes of development, aided by the constant adoption of Norman-French words, reduced the multitude of inflexional terminations to the four before mentioned. The vowel in them, though very light, had not lost its value as a separate syllable; it is almost always necessary to preserve its pronunciation in Chaucer, and in order to help the reader we shall use the same device as is used by the editors of the Globe "Chaucer": when it is very important to sound the *e* it will be surmounted by a dot, as *ė*. With the exception presently noted, the final *e* should always be slightly sounded, and no dot will be used to indicate this.

The importance of attending to these syllables can easily be seen by reading almost any line of Chaucer. Take for example the first two lines of the "Canterbury Tales":

> Whán that Aprílle with his shourės sootė
> The droghte of March hath percėd to the rootė,

It is evident that the sounding of each marked *e* slightly is necessary to the easy flow of the verse. Without it, the movement, which is a wonderfully delicate music in reality, becomes little better than doggerel.

The force of the final *e* is generally easy to perceive; but we may draw attention to a few of its uses. It forms the dative case of

nouns (*rootė*); the plural of adjectives (*sootė*); the definite form of the adjective—that is, the form which follows the definite article, the demonstrative and the possessive adjectives (the *yongė* sonne); and in verbs it often marks the infinitive mood (*sekė*), as well as other inflexions. It is also found occasionally in the past participle of strong verbs (*yronnė*) and less frequently in the past tense of certain verbs (*haddė, woldė, feddė*).

The termination *ėn* is a common sign of the infinitive (*sekėn*), of the past participle of strong verbs (*holpėn*), and of the plural of both present and past tenses of all verbs (*makėn, werėn*). The inflexion *ės* marks the plural of nouns (*shourės*), and the possessive case singular of nouns (*shirės endė*). It occurs also in adverbs, and is always a distinct syllable (*twiės*).

Final *e* is always silent when it is followed by another vowel or *h*. In similar circumstances the *e* of *-en*, or *ed* is often dropped in pronunciation. Sometimes, but not very frequently, the *-ė* is silent when no vowel or *h* follows. When required by metrical purposes, the blending of two successive vowels into one must be made in Chaucer, very much as it is in later poets. But he also uses such forms as *nis* (= *ne is*, is not), *nil* (= *ne wil*), *nadde* (= *ne hadde*), etc., which have no counterparts now.

A few minor hints may be added. The pronouns are generally self-explanatory, but note should be made of the following forms:

hem = them, or to them ; *here, her* = their ; *hire, hir* = her ; *that he* = who (relative) ; *his* = its ; *atte* = at the ; *wiltow* = wilt thou. The objective forms, like *me, him, hem, her,* are dative as well. The present participle ends in *-yng* or *-yngė* ; the past has frequently the old prefix *y-* or *i-* (*yronnė*).

If the reader will now take every word in the first twenty lines of the "Canterbury Tales" and work out its exact meaning from the hints here given, he will need no more than the glossary henceforth. With regard to pronunciation the most useful advice that can be given here is to treat words which are obviously of French origin as French words and to render most of the others as they would be rendered in modern English. This is not altogether satisfactory in many cases, but it is probably as near as a beginner can expect to get.

We subjoin the passage to which we have referred in these remarks.

Whán that Aprílle with his shourès soote
The droghte of March hath percèd to the roote,
And bathèd every veyne in swich licóur
Of which vertú engendred is the flour ;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swetè breeth
Inspirèd hath in every holt and heeth
The tendrè croppès, and the yongè sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfè cours y-ronne,
And smalè fowelès maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye,—
So priketh hem Natúre in hir coráges,—
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

And palmeres for to seken straungė strondes,
To fernė halwės, kowthe in sondry londes ;
And specially, from every shirės ende
Of Engėlond, to Caunturbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

II

INDUSTRIOUS research among mediæval records has made it possible to fix 1340 as the approximate birth-year of Geoffrey Chaucer and the city of London as his birthplace. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner of some position and fortune in the city, and probably accompanied the King, Edward III, on one of his commercial missions up the Rhine in 1338. Certainly his son had early access to the royal circle ; equally certainly the future poet had a good education ; and we must therefore suppose his early circumstances to have been comfortable.

Nothing at all is definitely known of his boyhood ; but his home was in the heart of London, close to Wallbrook and near the Thames, even then one of the busiest centres of the world's trade ; and it is not difficult to imagine the observant and high-spirited boy amusing himself in the narrow streets and by the lively river-side. Games of ball, cock-fighting, archery, and other mediæval sports doubtless attracted him ; the fields across the river and the country lanes in

the villages to the north made early and enduring impression on him ; but probably he owed much more to the motley throng of merchants and shipmen of every class and country who jostled one another in the streets and wharves. His knowledge of life was derived, like Shakespeare's, from the " battered caravanserai " which surrounded him ; it was a compound of various elements in which a genuine love of nature and an intense interest in the doings and characters of human beings were predominant. That London was his most influential environment in these early years is undoubted ; yet a good case has been suggested that he also had a close acquaintance with East Anglia—the neighbourhood of Lynn is mentioned ; and his language at least offers no obstacle to this idea.

Of education in the formal sense he must have had a liberal amount, though no definite record of it survives. He may have attended one of the grammar schools attached to the city churches, or he may have been taught by some poor clerk (or clergyman) of London. Again, he may have been sent to one or other of the English universities, or even to that of Paris. In any case he acquired a wide and varied knowledge. He was well read in Latin classics, especially in Ovid ; his poems abound in allusions to writers and writings, often obscure ; such a poem as the " Squire's Tale " and his treatise on the Astrolabe show his interest in the ' science ' of his day ; and his prose translation of Boëthius is evidence enough

of his philosophical tastes. That he knew French well goes almost without saying ; he also knew Italian, and found congenial comradeship in the writings at once of Dante and of Boccaccio. In short, he was a man of real culture in the fullest sense—a lover of books and a lover of life, drawing the best from both. By the combination of his education and his experience he became a polished man of the world, good company for the highest and the wisest in the land.

Whatever may be the facts about his early education, however, it was at an end in the year 1357, for the first authentic reference to him is dated from that year. Some of the household accounts for the year 1357 of the Countess of Ulster, wife of Lionel Duke of Clarence, third son of the King, have been accidentally preserved ; and among the less important entries was a record of clothes given to Geoffrey Chaucer—a paltok (short cloak), a pair of red and black tight breeches, and shoes. We may therefore suppose that, either by interest or by merit or both, Chaucer took his first step in Court employment as page to the Countess. With her he probably saw much of the pomp and gaiety which filled the lives of the great in the Middle Ages. From her accounts, it is evident that the lady travelled much ; and what he saw on these journeys must have impressed the sensitive nature of the poet deeply, especially at his plastic age. By this time he had probably discovered his talent

for verse, and no doubt his ready lays and rondels were his chief passports to Court favour.

Two years later, in 1359, Chaucer had advanced so far that he accompanied the King on his unsuccessful campaign into France, not as a page but as a combatant. Here he saw and felt the thrills and the hardships of marches and counter-marches, skirmishes and raids, triumphs and rebuffs, plunder and revelry, which accompanied a mediæval campaign. All the paraphernalia of chivalrous warfare were out—the grand knights with their long retinues, the mighty baggage-train, the motley camp-followers ; there were hunting and hawking for the idle hours, much gallantry and tawdry chivalry ; and the poet played a personal part in all, such as enabled him to write with confidence upon these courtly feudal conflicts in later years. The King's army was, however, unlucky. It laid siege to Rheims, but failed to take the ancient city. The weather and want of food caused the investment to be abandoned. Among the prisoners taken, possibly during some foraging raid, was Chaucer. At the conclusion of peace at Bretigny in 1360, the King contributed £16 (£240 in our value) toward his ransom, and thus showed the rate at which he estimated Chaucer's services.

We have to leap over a gap of seven years before obtaining our next glimpse of the poet. In 1366 his father had died, without making any difference to his circumstances, as far as can be traced. But in the next year, 1367, we

find him in the enjoyment of a pension of twenty marks (£13 6s. 8d.) from the King, and referred to as *dilectus valettus regis*—the King's beloved valet. Next year he became an esquire of the lesser degree. The valet, or yeoman of the chamber, was a kind of gentleman-in-waiting whose duties were to serve in the chamber, to make beds, to carry torches and to do "divers other things which the chamberlain shall command them." The yeomen slept two by two on beds in the great hall, and had meals "in the chamber before the King." When he became esquire, Chaucer saw more of the inner life of the Court, at a time when its mediæval magnificence had in England almost reached its zenith. The spoils of the French wars were being lavishly squandered by Edward and his courtiers. The days were filled with sports, and the nights with gorgeous entertainments. It was the expiring blaze of the age of chivalry in England, when it had become a fashionable affectation. In this environment it was the business of the esquires to provide for the piping, harping, and singing, to talk "of Chronicles of Kings and of other policies," to recite knightly and martial deeds, to occupy the Court generally, and to attend to strangers. Such duties called for the readiest wit and tact, and we need no strain upon our imagination to picture Chaucer as a very successful and valued esquire of the Household. His life at Court fostered the development and largely determined the direction of his early poetry; his

poetic gift in its turn was chiefly responsible for his position at Court.

We may picture the young poet as a handsome and attractive personality, pleasing in manners, with a gay and whimsical humour, yet liable to moods of seriousness and gravity that became him well and did not diminish his welcome at the King's palace. For, behind the gaudy pomp and profuse ornamentation, the affectation and ostentation, which characterized this last blaze of mediæval splendour, there was a certain element of seriousness, a genuine respect for the real ideals of chivalry. Above the devious intrigues and schemings of Court aspirants there ruled a King whose power and achievements were by no means all show. Moreover, the love-making was not always a mere matter of florid compliments and empty, half-scornful courtesy. To an impressionable, sensuous young man like Chaucer, Cupid's arrows were not likely to be entirely fanciful : one love adventure with a lady of high degree seems to have bitten him ; and the grave demeanour which often turned his humour into melancholy is in that case readily accounted for.

Love-making, not too nice or fastidious, was, indeed, the staple amusement of these "idle rich." Love was the theme of the poems and songs of the current versifiers ; unhappily none of Chaucer's early attempts in this kind have been preserved to us. But it is known that he translated a great deal of the "Roman de la Rose," a French poem of the thirteenth century,

which inspired most of the love-literature of the time, and was the most influential poem in Europe during the later Middle Ages. A long fragment of a translation of this poem is usually printed among Chaucer's works, and some portions—say the first 1500 lines—are not unworthy of him. But the general opinion of the best students of Chaucer decides against his authorship, and consequently that Chaucer's version of the famous poem has been lost. Nevertheless it is of interest to note the probability that Chaucer spent many hours upon this work during his Court career, and thus delighted both his patrons and his peers.[1]

The "Romaunt of the Rose," we may here note, is a complex allegory of love, very long and tedious in a busy age like ours, but very suitable to the requirements of feudal times. The first part of the poem was the work of one Guillaume de Lorris, and was written about 1230; some forty years later the poem was completed by a new poet called Jean de Meung. But the gap between the two halves of the poem was wide enough to allow for a complete change in the tone of it. The first poet took his allegory in the most serious vein of a poet of chivalry. His work is full of careful symbolism, of elaborate discussions and descriptions; it is a beautiful, but very artificial, garden, peopled with handsome squires and lovely ladies, allegorical

[1] Ten Brink, in his masterly study of Chaucer, dates Chaucer's translation about 1379–80. In all probability, so long a work was taken up and laid aside frequently, and issued in batches. A mediæval manuscript is not a modern book, and the loss of a manuscript poem is no matter of surprise.

figures and personified emotions, and adorned with every natural delight, of which the chief wonder is the Fountain of Love. At the bottom of this fountain the errant lover sees the image of the rose which is the symbol of his quest. The narration of the lover's difficulties in plucking the rose is the main business of the poem ; so far as Guillaume de Lorris is concerned, this is carried out in a vague, meandering, flowery fashion, not without dignity or seriousness, but in the unreal atmosphere of a dream. Lorris idealized love, until it became a supersensuous mist.

Jean de Meung, on the other hand, completed the poem in what we may almost call a realistic spirit. The method of Lorris had already become obsolete ; and, being artificial, it lent itself readily to satire. In place of Lorris's dreamy philosophizing, his coadjutor gives us the sarcasms of common sense. The women known to Jean de Meung provoke his scornful contempt, instead of acting as themes for an idealist's rapture. Jean is a critical, almost cynical, man of the world. In this remarkable poem we thus have the same allegory applied to the elucidation of two mutually irreconcilable aspects of love—the artificial-pretty and the cynical-coarse. At first we cannot doubt that it was Guillaume's portion that pleased Chaucer ; his earliest surviving poems show the influence too strongly to leave us any doubt ; but the broader and more worldly spirit of Jean de Meung appears later on in such a masterpiece

of creative humour as the "Wife of Bath," which is worth the whole of the "Romaunt of the Rose." Nevertheless, we have to realize that Chaucer's mind was full of the "Romaunt" during the years when it was most receptive and while he was training his muse.

A few lines from the version ascribed to Chaucer, and from that part which, if any, is most likely to be his, we may here give as an example of his early style or of the style he would have employed. We cannot spare space for a real sample ; the poem is so leisurely and prolix that several hundred lines would be needed for that ; but the few lines given illustrate fairly the poet's control of metre and his descriptive power. The lover has already wandered some 1400 lines through the garden of his dream, describing the figures and sights that meet his view.

These trees were sette, that I devyse,
One from another in assyse
Fyve fadome or sixe, I trowė so ;
But they were hye and great also,
And for to kepe out wel the sonne,
The croppės were so thicke y-ronne,
And every braunche in other knette,
And ful of grenė leves sette,
That sonnė myght there none discende,
Lest [it] the tender grasses shende.
There myght men does and roes y-se,
And of squyrels ful great plente
From bowe to bowe alwaye lepynge ;
Connės there were also plaiynge,

That comyn out of her clapers,
Of sondrie colours and maners,
And maden many a tourneiyng
Upon the fresshė grasse spryngyng.
In places sawe I wellės there
In whichė there no froggės were,
And fayre in shadowe was every welle.
But I ne can the nombre telle
Of stremys smal, that by devyse
Myrthe had done come through condyse ;
Of whiche the water in rennyng
Gan make a noysė ful lykyng.
About the brinkės of these welles
And by the stremės over al elles
Sprange up the grasse, as thicke y-set
And softe as any veluet,
On whiche men myght his lemman ley
As on a fetherbed to pley,
For the erthė was ful softe and swete.
Through moisture of the wellė wete
Spronge up the sotė grenė gras
As fayre, as thicke, as myster was.
But moche amended it the place
That therthė was of suche a grace
That it of flourės hath plente,
That bothe in somer and wynter be.
There sprange the vyolet al newe,
And fresshe pervynkė riche of hewe,
And floures yelowe, white, and rede,
Suche plente grewe there never in mede.
Ful gaye was al the grounde, and queynt
And poudred, as men had it peynt
With many a fresshe and sondrie floure,
That casten up ful good savour.

The fact that Chaucer could sing the pangs

of slighted love need not be inconsistent with the further fact that by the year 1366, while he was still at Court, he was in all probability a married man. In that year Queen Philippa granted a small life-pension to one of her chamber ladies, named Philippa Chaucer. This lady is also referred to in 1372 as belonging to the household of the Duchess of Lancaster; and two years later we find that the poet drew the pension in her name. Mistress Chaucer was doubtless identical with the lady referred to in the Countess of Ulster's household accounts of 1357 as Philippa *Pan'*, on whose behalf the Countess paid "for the making of a corset for Philippa and for the fur-work" for a tunic, for forty-eight great buttons, and other items of dress apparently. The abbreviation *Pan'* is supposed to stand for *panetaria*, mistress of the pantry. It would thus seem that Chaucer met his future wife in the Clarence household, that she was at first a little above him in station, and that after their marriage they both held honourable place about the King and Queen. One or two slight hints point to Philippa's ancestry: she was probably sister to Katharine Rouet, who became first Katharine Swynford and afterward the third wife of John of Gaunt, and founder of the famous family of Beauforts. Certainly the Chaucers were closely bound up with the fortunes of the restless head of the House of Lancaster.

That Chaucer was a faithful husband is very improbable, and equally improbable is it that

his married life was a happy one. Indiscriminate love-making was the commonplace of the decadent chivalry of the time, and Chaucer's various 'complaints' about unknown lady-loves must have had some basis in fact. A heartbreaking passion for a married woman would not have aroused a blush in Chaucer's environment. The age was a strange mixture of restraint and licence in regard to the female sex. The fickle Cressida and the light-of-love demurely modest were common types. And the biting irony with which Chaucer often refers to wedded life seems to reflect his own experience. Read, for example, the following stanzas with which he closes the "Clerkes Tale" (1381), the touching story of Griselda, the patient wife.

Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience,
And bothe atonès buryed in Ytaille ;
For which I crie in open audience,
No wedded man so hardy be tassaille
His wyvès pacience in hope to fynde
Grisildis, for in certein he shal faille !

O noble wyvès, ful of heigh prudence,
Lat noon humylitee youre tongė naill,
Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille
As of Grisildis pacient and kynde,
Lest *Chichivache*[1] yow swelwe in hire entraille !

Folweth Ekko, that holdeth no silence,
But ever answereth at the countretaille.

[1] 'Chichivache,' the lean cow who fed on patient wives.

Beth nat bidaffèd for youre innocence,
But sharply taak on yow the governaille.
Emprenteth wel this lessoun in youre mynde
For commune profit sith it may availle.

Ye archiwyvès stondeth at defense,
Syn ye be strong as is a greet camaille,
Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offense ;
And sklendrè wyvès, fieble, as in bataille,
Beth egre as is a tygrè yond in Ynde ;
Ay clappeth as a mille, I yow consaille ;

Ne dreed hem nat, doth hem no reverence,
For though thyn housbonde armèd be in maille,
The arwès of thy crabbèd eloquence
Shal perce his brest, and eek his aventaille.
In jalousie I rede eek thou hym bynde,
And thou shalt make hym couche as dooth a quaille.

If thou be fair, ther folk been in presence
Shewe thou thy visage and thyn apparaille ;
If thou be foul, be fre of thy dispence,
To gete thee freendès ay do thy travaille ;
Be ay of chiere, as light as leef on lynde,
And lat hym care and wepe, and wryng and waille !

Chaucer's wife was evidently not a Griselda. Still, he did not suffer in the worldly sense through his marriage. Philippa was apparently as much a favourite in royal circles as he, and carried especial weight in the household of the Duchess of Lancaster.

In 1369 the death of Blanche, the first Duchess of Lancaster, turned Chaucer's mind to the composition of the earliest of his extant

original poems. The Duchess seems to have been a lady of singular virtue and charm, and her death was accompanied by universal mourning. Chaucer's description of her, composed possibly in the lively hope of an increase in the Duke's favour, is on the whole a worthy eulogy of her pleasing qualities ; the dramatic touches, so characteristic of Chaucer's mature works, are by no means absent here, and the whole atmosphere of the poem is that of a dream-idyll. Apart from the slight foreshadowing of his dramatic genius, however, the poem is quite deficient in real originality. It is a bundle of borrowed plumes, so ineffectually arranged that their French sources can often be quite easily identified. But it must be remembered that the clever use of such fashionable materials as the " Roman de la Rose " would not be regarded by the young poet as a dishonourable plagiarism, nor by his readers as other than a merit. In those days of written manuscripts the circulation of poems was obviously restricted ; and any one who could bring the famous " Roman de la Rose " before the eye of readers who had often heard of it, but never read any of its lines, would be regarded as a benefactor. Besides, what work was so likely to appeal to a young poet, at once modest and ambitious, as one which reflected a little of the glory of the most famous poem of his time ?

To us, who read the poem after the " Canterbury Tales," the " Boke of the Duchesse "

comes as an anticlimax ; it is tedious, rambling, conventional, inartistic. These adjectives are, however, the result of an unfair comparison. It was no mean thing to gain in English a full echo of the grace and gaiety of the French metres. It was almost a new, as it was certainly a successful, invention. It opened the gate for Chaucer's later poems, whose freshness, wit, and charm it quite foreshadowed. Its octosyllabic couplets move often with delightful freedom, and to singularly pure rimes. It showed that in the English language there was hidden an unsuspected possibility of beauty and harmony. It revealed the master of a strange new instrument, and in criticizing the poem this newness should be remembered.

It opens with a prologue of disproportionate length, in which the poet, tortured with sleeplessness and with hopeless love, appeals for aid to Morpheus. He tells how he comes across an old book and finds therein a touching story with which he beguiles the weary hours. The book is Ovid's "Metamorphoses," and the story that of Ceyx and Alcyone, an apposite tale of love and death. Making a solemn vow to Morpheus, he at last falls asleep ; and, after the fashion of the "Roman de la Rose," a wondrous dream befalls him.

Lo, thus hit was, this was my sweven.

The Dream

Me thoghtė thus,—that hit was May
And in the dawenyng I lay,

(Me mette thus,) in my bed al naked,
And lokėd forth, for I was wakėd
With smalė foulės a gret hepe,
That had affrayed me out of my slepe
Through noyse and swetnesse of her song.
And as me mette they sate a-mong
Upon my chambre roof wyth-oute
Upon the tyles over al a-boute,
And songen, everich in his wyse,
The mostė solempnė servyse
By note, that ever man, I trowe,
Hadde herd ; for som of hem songe lowe
Som hye, and al of oon acorde.
To tellė shortly, at oo worde,
Was never herd so swete a steven,—
But hit hadde be a thyng of heven,—
So mery a soun, so swete entunes,
That certes, for the toune of Tewnes,
I nolde but I hadde herd hem synge,
For al my chambre gan to rynge
Through syngyng of hir armonye.
For instrument nor melodye
Was nowher herd yet half so swete,
Nor of acordė half so mete ;
For ther was noon of hem that feynėd
To synge, for ech of hem him peynėd
To fynde out mery crafty notes ;
They ne sparėd not hir throtes.

This is a favourable specimen of the poet's descriptive power. Issuing from his room, he joins a body of huntsmen and shares in the chase, until, after the hounds are called away, he is left alone in the wood. These pretty preliminaries occupy over four hundred lines ;

not until he meets the young man in black does the poet touch his real *motif*. This young man narrates to the sympathetic dreamer the story of his wooing, of his matchless lady White, of their married happiness—all with a delicacy of taste and feeling which amply atones for its discursiveness. Although the mourner several times refers to his mysterious sorrow, his listener does not perceive what its cause is, until the young man specifies it in so many words.

"She ys deed!"

"Nay!"

"Yis, by my trouthe!"

"Is that your los? By God hit is routhe!"

Thus abruptly does the dream end, as though the poet had exhausted his vocabulary of grief before the climax of his poem was reached. This hurried close must not be taken to indicate an absence of real feeling from the poem. Nor does its indebtedness to many French models detract from the evidence of sincerity which we find in it. It is this individual note that redeems the poem; the touches of personal experience and the pleasure of the nature-passages atone very largely for the absence of an original creative power. If it be no more than a cento of paraphrases, it is by no means without interest to English readers.

Another poem which must certainly be placed among the poet's earliest work is the "Compleynte unto Pite." By some of Chaucer's editors it is placed before the poem on the

Duchess, and has, indeed, been ascribed to the early days of his courtship before Philippa accepted his affections. This is improbable, because as a piece of art it represents a very distinct advance on the "Boke of the Duchesse" and because it is obviously a carefully written poetical exercise, for which, however, no French model has yet been found. We shall quote the whole poem, and the reader will then be able to decide whether or not it represents a real amorous episode of the poet's. The allegory is apt, and by no means tedious, but the note of personal passion is conspicuously wanting. The poet is master of his grief, if it existed, and his complaint cannot be regarded as anything more than a rather frigid pastime. But when we consider its form and diction, the interest of the poem grows. It is written in the stanza called *rime-royal*,[1] which Chaucer used with such fine effect later on. He obtained the stanza from the French poet Guillaume de Machault, to whom he had been indebted for ideas and suggestions in the "Boke of the Duchesse." It had been popular among the Provençal poets, but no one had obtained from it so much variety of cadence and movement as Chaucer did, even in this first attempt of his. For this alone the poem deserves honourable mention in the story of English poetry. Chaucer was to do much finer work in the same metre later on, and the "Compleynte" is entirely

[1] Named after King James I of Scotland, who wrote his poem "The King's Quair" in this metre.

without those touches of sly satire which were his special gifts. But it is a favourable specimen of his early efforts in the allegorical vein; and as it is not too long we venture to quote it whole.

As will be seen, the poem falls into two parts. The poet at first tells how he was anxious to seek the help of Pity against his inveterate enemy, Cruelty. For this purpose he drew up a 'bill' in writing, which he wished to present to her. But unfortunately Pity was dead, and he could only gaze upon her body, surrounded as it was by a cluster of her foes, who seemed to be conspiring to slay him. Of course he could not read his bill to such a company. He was therefore content to set his woes and griefs before his kind readers. He was the sport of a malicious fate; everything went wrong with him; and in language as conventional as possible he tells us so.

THE COMPLEYNTE UNTO PITE

Complainte of the Deathe of Pitie, in Stowe's hand

Pitè that I have sought so yore ago
With hertè sore and ful of besy peyne,
That in this worlde was never wight so wo
With-outè dethe; and if I shal not feyne,
My purpos was to Pite to compleyne
Upon the crueltee and tirannye
Of Love, that for my trouthè doth me dye.

And when that I, by lengthe of certeyn yeres,
Had evere in oon a tymè sought to speke,

To Pite ran I, al bespreynt with teres,
To preyen hir on Crueltee me a wreke ;
But er I myght with any worde out-breke,
Or tellen any of my peynès smerte,
I fond hir deed and buried in an herte.

Adoun fel I when that I saugh the herse,
Deed as a stoon, whyl that the swogh me laste ;
But up I roos with colour ful dyverse,
And pitously on hir myn eyen I caste,
And ner the corps I gan to presen faste,
And for the soule I shoop me for to preye ;
I nas but lorne, ther was no more to sey.

Thus am I slayn sith that Pitè is deed ;
Allas the day ! that ever hit shulde falle !
What maner man dar now holde up his heed ?
To whom shal any sorwful hertè calle ?
Now Crueltee hath cast to sleen us alle,
In ydel hope, folk redèlees of peyne,—
Sith she is deed, to whom shul we compleyne ?

But yet encreseth me this wonder newe,
That no wight woot that she is deed but I ;
So mony men as in her tyme hir knewe,
And yet she dyèd not so sodeynly ;
For I have sought hir ever ful besily
Sith I first haddè wit or mannès mynde ;
But she was deed er that I coude hir fynde.

Aboute hir herse ther stoden lustily,
Withouten any wo, as thoughtè me,
Bountee parfit, wel-armed and richèly,
And fresshè Beautee, Lust and Jolitee,
Assured Maner, Youthe and Honestee,

Wisdom, Estaat, and Dŕeed, and Governaunce,
Confedred bothe by bonde and alliaunce.

A compleynte hadde I writen in myn hond,
For to have put to Pite as a bille ;
But whan I al this companye ther fond,
That rather wolden al my causė spille
Than do me help, I held my pleyntė stille ;
For to tho folk, with-outen any faile,
Withoutė Pite may no bille availe.

Then leve I al thise vertues, sauf Pitė,
Kepyng the corps, as ye have herd me seyn,
Cofedred alle by bonde of Cruelte,
And ben assented that I shal be sleyn.
And I have put my Compleynte up ageyn ;
For to my foes my bille I dar not shewe,
Theffect of which seith thus in wordės fewe.

The Bille

Humblest of herte, highest of reverence,
Benygnė flour, coroune of vertues alle !
Sheweth un-to your rial excellence
Your servaunt, if I durstė me so calle,
His mortal harm in which he is y-falle ;
And noght al only for his evel fare,
But for your renoun, as he shal declare.

Hit stondeth thus, your contraire Crueltee
Allyed is ageynst your regalye,
Under colour of womanly Beautee,—
For men ne shulde not knowe hir tirannye,—
With Bountee, Gentilesse, and Curtesye,
And hath depryvėd yow now of your place,
That highte " Beautee apertenant to Grace."

For kyndly, by your heritagė right,
Ye been annexėd ever unto Bountee,
And verrayly ye oughtė do your myght
To helpė Trouthe in his adversitee.
Ye been also the coroune of Beautee,
And certes, if ye wanten in thise tweyne
The world is lore ; ther nis no more to seyne.

Eek what availeth Maner and Gentilesse
Withoutė you, benygnė creature !
Shal Crueltee be your governeresse ?
Allas ! what hertė may hit long endure ?
Wherfor but ye the rather takė cure
To brekė that perilous alliaunce,
Ye sleen hem that ben in your obeisaunce.

And further over, if ye suffre this,
Your renoun is fordo than in a throwe ;
Ther shal no man wite wel what Pite is.
Allas ! that your renoun shoulde be so lowe ;
Ye be than fro your heritage y-throwe
By Crueltee, that occupieth your place,
And we despeired that seken to your grace.

Have mercy on me, thou serenous quene,
That you have sought so tenderly and yore,
Let som streem of your light on me be sene,
That love and drede yow ever lenger the more ;
For, sothly for to seyne, I bere the sore,
And though I be not cunnyng for to pleyne,
For Goddės love, have mercy on my peyne !

My peyne is this, that what-so I desire,
That have I not, ne no thing lyk therto ;
And ever set Desire myn herte on fire,

Eek on that other syde where-so I go.
What maner thinge that may encrese my wo
That have I redy, unsoght, everywhere,
Me ne lakketh but my deth, and than my bere.

What nedeth to shewė parcel of my peyne,
Sith every wo that hertė may be-thynke,
I suffre ? And yet I dar not to you pleyne,
For wel I woot, although I wake or wynke,
Ye rekkė not whether I flete or synke
But nathėles, my trouthe I shal sustene
Unto my deth, and that shal wel be sene.

This is to seyne, I wol be yourės ever ;
Though ye me slee by Crueltee your fo,
Algate my spirit shal never dissever
Fro your servyse, for any peyne or wo !
Sith ye be deed,—allas ! that hit is so !—
Thus for your deth I may wel wepe and pleyne
With hertė sore, and ful of besy peyne !

Here endeth the exclamacion of the Deth of Pyte

Love was not the only inspiration that moved Chaucer's mood at this period. He would not have been a thoroughgoing mediæval poet if he had not been at one time or another touched by the mystical aspects of religion. Devotion to the Church was a necessary corollary, or rather prelude, to chivalry ; the monk was as genuine a product of the Middle Ages as was the troubadour. But the reign of Edward III was marked by much freedom in this devotion. The laws of præmunire show very little respect for the Church in its temporal guise, and the writings

of Wiclif and Langland were soon to touch its spiritual condition also. Chaucer shared much of this independence, especially in his later life ; but he seems to have passed through periods of spiritual crisis, in which he was thrown back in great humility upon his religious exercises. If the friars and monks were the butts of his satire, the good parson was treated with genuine respect ; the pardoner's relics provoked his scorn, but an earnest prayer touched his heart. In one of his devotional moods he wrote his "A B C," a paraphrase of a portion of a French religious allegory, couched in a tone of real piety. It approaches indeed as close to mariolatry as he ever got. Tradition has it that the poem was suggested by Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, but the fine first stanza recalls Dante a little and suggests that it was composed a year or so later than her death, after the poet had been to Italy. Each stanza commences with a fresh letter of the alphabet up to the number of twenty-three. As we have said, the poem is little more than a free translation ; we therefore content ourselves with quoting the first stanza.

Al myghty and al mercyable Queene,
To whom that al this world fleeth for socour
To have relees of sinne, of sorwe, and teene !
Glorious Virgine, of allė flourės flour,
To thee I flee confounded in errour.
Help, and releeve, thou mihti debonayre,
Have mercy on my perilous langour !
Venquisshed me hath my cruel adversaire.

The period in which French influence dominated the development of Chaucer's genius now comes to an end. It is curious that no poem purely lyrical has yet been justly ascribed to him, but he must have written many. He himself refers to many "fresh ditties, complaints, ballades, roundels and virelais"; and in his Retraction, affixed to the "Canterbury Tales," he asks forgiveness for "many a song and many a lecherous lay." The loss of these lays is the less to be regretted, because Chaucer does not reveal in those poems which have survived any very striking lyric gift. His songs were probably quite conventional, and he took no pains to save them. Henceforward, while in no way rejecting outside influences, he becomes less and less imitative every year; what he borrows or steals, he transforms into richer hues and infuses with fuller life.

III

AFTER serving for a second time in France during 1369, Chaucer went on the first of his missions to foreign countries in 1370. It is not certain where he went, or on what service, on this occasion; what we do know is that it was necessary for him, now and afterwards, to accept royal letters of protection against the pressure of creditors. Notwithstanding pensions and bounties, Chaucer

seems to have been consistently in debt; evidently he had not mastered Mr. Micawber's art of living happily, and was not destined to do so. If he was not businesslike in this respect, however, he had developed the tact and address necessary for diplomatic success, for he was several times employed in such work and was liberally paid for his services.

He drew his pension in person in 1371 and 1372, but toward the end of the latter year he went with two Genoese merchants to Genoa, as a member of an embassy to the Duke of Genoa, the object of which was to develop the commercial connexion between the two countries. This visit to Italy was of great importance to Chaucer, and marked a distinct epoch in his life. It lasted nearly a year, and was not confined to Genoa; he certainly went to Florence, and probably to other important cities as well. For the expenses of his journey he received the not inconsiderable sum of 138 marks (£1400 in our value), of which 100 marks were paid in advance.

The suggestion, very commonly believed, that Chaucer was a member of the suite of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, when he married Violante Visconti of Milan in 1368, cannot be accepted as definite history, however tempting it may be. If he went to Italy then, the visit does not appear to have affected his poetry. It is an interesting possibility, however, because the Italian poet Petrarch is known to have been

present at that wedding ; and Chaucer in the prologue to the "Clerkes Tale," makes the clerk say that he learned his story from Petrarch himself at Padua. Now Petrarch died in 1374 ; he was thus an old man, of great and well-established reputation, when Chaucer was in Italy ; and Chaucer was evidently proud of having met him. But it is not known that he visited Padua in 1373, although of course he might have done so. It is therefore possible that he was in Italy in 1368, accompanying his old master to a ceremony which was so soon to lead to tragic consequences for the prince.

The journey through Europe, full of peril and discomfort as it must have been, made no impression on Chaucer's mind. The Channel passage, to begin with, was a horror, often taking several days to make. Chaucer was emphatically a landsman and evidently had unpleasant memories of the sea. There is nothing in his verse of that fascination which the tumbling waves and tempests have had for English poets from the author of "Beowulf" to Swinburne. Nor was he impressed by the snows and glaciers of the Alps. He was a lover of spring sunshine and summer flowers, and the sterner aspects of nature are never allowed to intrude into his poems. There is much about the "merry month" of May, but little about the bleak storms of February. He is happy in an elaborate garden sprinkled with many fountains, but the leap of the torrent and the

hum of distant waterfalls alike find no echo in his soul. In this he was of course not superior to his age. Apart from his delight in a bright English spring day, he was almost untouched by the moods of Nature, and in this respect falls out of line with most of his peers in our poetry.

Once in Italy, however, Chaucer came into or near to the focus of the best European culture of that time. The cities of northern Italy—Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Milan, Padua, to name only the greatest—were not then the repositories of bygone glories ; they were living centres of art and literature. Painting, sculpture, and architecture were ripening into that prolific summer of art which produced the great masters —the Raphaels and Michelangelos ; art was looking forward to unknown triumphs, not backward on to fading frescoes and crumbling monuments. And literature was even more advanced. Dante had been dead some sixty years ; Petrarch and Boccaccio were living—the one near Padua and the other at Florence ; in the genius of these three great poets, the sun of the Renaissance had produced a rosy dawn and burst into a brilliant morning splendour. In the atmosphere of culture thus created Chaucer was at home. It was this that made his visit so valuable to him. A poet who had expressed the finest wine from the vineyard he had been able to till ; a scholar, already well read in Latin and French ; a writer who had already shown himself sensitive to the music

of words ; a man of varied interests,—he was in danger of falling in with an exhausted fashion and working in an exhausted mine, and was especially fitted by his genius to profit by the wider vision and the higher ideals of art which Italy opened up to him.

Of these three poets, Petrarch probably had least influence upon Chaucer. He was in the first place a lyric poet of exceptional power and beauty, which Chaucer certainly was not ; and the fashion set by him in lyric verse did not spread to England until the revival of poetry by Wyatt and Surrey in the middle of the sixteenth century. But in the second place he was a humanist—a profound scholar who knew the Latin masterpieces, not as frigid exercises in an artificial language, but as vital human works of art. He did not treat the ancients from the standpoint of a pedant or a bookworm, but from that of a man who found them rich in the ore of human experience. In this spirit Chaucer, too, was henceforth to work ; like Petrarch, he was to breathe the spirit of the Renaissance ; in being a poet, he was not to cease to be a man. Yet Chaucer was emphatically the poet of his own time, and had very little of Petrarch's intense and vivid power of reviving an antique era.

Chaucer owed to Petrarch his beautiful and touching poem now known as the "Clerkes Tale." This poem, which we shall mention again later on, was obtained by Chaucer from Petrarch's Latin version of the same story,

written late in the Italian poet's life. As we have said, he was probably introduced to the story by Petrarch himself, from whom indeed he may have obtained a copy. It is hence likely that he composed his own version, which follows the original fairly closely but by no means slavishly, as soon as possible after his return to England. It was then laid aside and used a dozen years later to fill up a niche in the scheme of the "Canterbury Tales," the epilogue which we have previously quoted (p. 33) being added at the later date. The finished poem is a beautiful piece of poetry; the versification is far beyond anything else that Chaucer had yet achieved; and the tale is told with the dramatic and sympathetic skill in which he is even yet unrivalled. If he owed nothing more than this to Petrarch his debt would be very great, and his handsome acknowledgment of it is certainly worth quoting.

From the Prologue to the Clerkes Tale

I wol yow telle a talė which that I
Lernėd at Padwė of a worthy clerk,
As prevėd by his wordės and his werk;
He is now deed and nayléd in his cheste,
I prey to God so yeve his soulė reste!
"Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
Hightė this clerk whos rethorikė sweete
Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie,—
As Lynyan dide of philosophie,
Or lawe, or oother art particuler,—
But deeth, that wol nat suffre us dwellen heer,

But as it were a twynklyng of an eye,
Hem bothe hath slayn, and allė shul we dye.
But forth to tellen of this worthy man
That taughtė me this tale, as I bigan,
I seye that first with heigh stile he enditeth,
Er he the body of his talė writeth,
A prohemye, in the which discryveth he
Pemond, and of Salucės the contree ;
And speketh of Apennyn, the hillės hye
That been the boundės of West Lumbardye,
And of Mount Vesulus in speciał,
Where as the Poo out of a wellė smal
Taketh his firstė spryngyng and his sours,
That estward ay encresseth in his cours
To Emeleward, to Ferrare and Venyse,—
The which a longe thyng werė to devyse,
And trewėly, as to my juggėment,
Me thynketh it a thyng impertinent,
Save that he wole convoyen his mateere ;
But this is his talė which that ye may heere."

Much as Chaucer owed to Petrarch, he owed yet more to Boccaccio, who was living at Florence at the very time that Chaucer paid his visit thereto. Strangely enough, however, we have no evidence that Chaucer ever met the famous Italian, nor does he anywhere acknowledge the many borrowings he made from him. But the "Knightes Tale," one of the very finest of Chaucer's poems, was quite certainly based on Boccaccio's ponderous Latin epic, the "Teseide" ; and "Troilus and Criseyde" is no less indebted to his "Filostrato." Moreover, the whole plan of the "Canterbury Tales" was

suggested by Boccaccio's "Decamerone"; and yet Chaucer never so much as refers to his deep indebtedness. Perhaps he deemed that the fame of Boccaccio made it unnecessary for him to do so, any more than he thought it needful to thank the authors of the "Roman de la Rose" for the uses he made of that poem. It is difficult to suppose, although it would not be impossible, that he used Boccaccio manuscripts without knowing their authorship. It is more difficult still to imagine him so paltry-minded as to neglect an honourable duty out of pique at a possible slight passed upon him by Boccaccio during his presence at Florence. Whatever may be the truth about this, the "Decamerone" undoubtedly pointed out to Chaucer the true outflow of his genius. Boccaccio's gay and pleasure-loving disposition, his love of learning and his love of life, his gift of story-telling and his broad humour, leading him often into coarseness, are reflected again in Chaucer and his "Canterbury Tales."

The influence of Dante upon Chaucer was more subtle but far more profound than that of Boccaccio or Petrarch. Though Dante may be thought of as the poet who has stamped mediæval Catholicism with the impress of immortality, that would be a very imperfect measure of his achievement. Deeply religious as he was, it is Virgil who was the inspirer of his art. He recognized the authority of the Church, but he was bold and fearless in his individual judgments, and his imagination was not shackled

by dogmas or distorted by external laws. The threads of his work were spun partly by Virgil, partly by the current theology, but the pattern was woven by his independent mind, ardent with glowing imagination, aflame with fiery sincerity ; design and workmanship sprang hot from his well-trained genius ; and his work shone out for Chaucer and his contemporaries as the perfect union of high seriousness, human sympathies, and skilful art. He was a magician of melodious words, a supreme master of rhythm, metaphor, and all that distinguishes poetry from prose. By the side of Dante, the " Roman de la Rose " seems a pretty and artificial trifle, over-dressed and over-scented.

The first perception of the nobility of the high style of the master-poets is a decisive event in the career of every student and every lover of poetry. Thus it was to Chaucer. His ideal of poetry was elevated into a higher sphere, his standard of expression raised. He learned the value of self-restraint and self-control ; voluble exuberance gave place to a pregnant concentration of thought and method. Chaucer was naturally fluent, and no verse is more free from signs of strain and effort than his. But this happy result came from the enthusiasm for fine and fit perfection of diction which Dante inspired ; it was the fruit of that highest art which conceals itself. If the best of the " Canterbury Tales " are models of narrative grace and appropriateness, surpassing their

originals in every particular, it is to Dante that the undoubted fact is due. After his Italian journeys, Chaucer became a poet of a new type in England—an artist-poet who understood the rules of proportion and, valuing his work as a creation undertaken for its own sake, paid close attention to the manner in which it was done.

Mysticism was the all-permeating quintessence of Dante's intellect, but it cannot be said to form a very important element in Chaucer's. Still, the religious sense was not absent from his world of experience. He had moods of remorseful repentance which reflect periods of acute spiritual crisis and which may in part have been suggested by Dante's intense fervour. In these moods, the gay and worldly poet, sceptical and satirical in the face of many of the shows of religion, was brought to his knees in prostrate earnestness before the eternal realities. He struggled often with the everlasting mysteries, battling with Dante for his guide and the Church for his support against the cynicism with which the freethinkers of Italy menaced his inner life. The habit of introspection seems to have been strong in him during the years which followed his visits to Italy ; the habit never wholly left him, though it grew less powerful in his later life ; and the works he wrote under its influence must not be overlooked in any attempt to estimate the full range of his mind.

One of these poems was the " Life of St

Cecile," afterwards incorporated in the Canterbury collection as the Second Nun's Tale. The poem is little more than a translation of the life of St Cecilia as told in the "Legenda Aurea," a famous book of Christian legends, of which Chaucer probably heard in Genoa, where its author, Jacobus à Voragine, was for a time bishop. It opens with some moralizing about idleness, "the ministre and the norice unto vice"; and, after some rapturous stanzas in praise of the Virgin and a discussion of the meaning of Cecilia's name, passes to the story itself. The holy maid, Cecile, was wedded against her will to the pagan Valerian. Telling him that she had previously been betrothed to an angel, she induced him to forgo the privileges of wedlock and to become her soul's bridegroom and a Christian. Encouraged by the holy Pope Urban, both face the ordeal of martyrdom. This story of Cecile's heroic end is told with a becoming dignity and a genuine piety; and though it cannot be counted among Chaucer's greatest efforts, it represents not unworthily the grave and serious mood which we may ascribe partly to Dante, but partly also to an innate strain of the poet's character—a strain which did not often emerge through the genial and worldly smile that it wore on the surface. The invocation to the Virgin Mary, taken almost bodily from Dante's "Paradiso," is perhaps the most interesting passage in the poem; it is quoted here, in order to enable us to see our poet in his pious hour.

INVOCACIO AD MARIAM

From the Second Nun's Tale

And thow that flour of virginès art alle,
Of whom that Bernard list so wel to write ;
To thee, at my bigynnyng, first I call,
Thou confort of us wrecches, do me endite
Thy maydens deeth, that wan thurgh hire merite
The eternel lyf, and of the feend victorie
As man may after reden in hire storie.

Thow mayde and mooder, doghter of thy sone,
Thow welle of mercy, synful soulès cure,
In whom that God, for bountee, chees to wone,
Thow humble, and heigh over every creature,
Thow nobledest so ferforth oure nature,
That no desdeyn the Makere hadde of kynde
His sone in blood and flessh to clothe and wynde.

Withinne the cloistre blisful of thy sydis
Took mannès shape the eterneel Love and Pees,
That of the trynė compas lord and gyde is,
Whom erthe, and see, and hevene, out of relees,
Ay heryen ; and thou virgine wemmėlees
Baar of thy body, and dweltest mayden pure,
The creatour of every creature.

Assembled is in thee magnificence,
With mercy, goodnesse, and with swich pitee,
That thou, that art the sonne of excellence,
Nat oonly helpest hem that preyen thee,
But often tyme, of thy benygnytee,
Ful frely, er that men thyn help biseche,
Thou goost biforn and art hir lyvès leche.

Now help, thow meeke and blisful fairė mayde,
Me flemėd wrecche in this desert of galle ;
Thynk on the womman Cananee, that sayde
That whelpes eten somme of the crommes alle
That from hir lordės table been y-falle,
And though that I, unworthy sone of Eve,
Be synful, yet acceptė my bileve.

And for that feith is deed withouten werkis,
So, for to werken, yif me wit and space,
That I be quit fro thennės that moost derk is.
O thou that art so fair and ful of grace,
Be myn advócat in that heighė place,
Theras withouten ende is songe Osanne,
Thow Cristės mooder, doghter deere of Anne !

And of thy light my soule in prison lighte,
That troubled is by the contagioun
Of my body, and also by the wighte
Of erthely lust and fals affeccioun !
O havene of refut, O salvacioun
Of hem that been in sorwe and in distresse,
Now helpe, for to my werk I wol me dresse !

Yet preye I yow that reden that I write,
Foryeve me that I do no diligence
This ilkė storie subtilly to endite,
For bothe have I the wordės and sentence
Of hym that at the seintės reverence
The storie wroot, and folwen hire legende ;
I pray yow that ye wole my werk amende.

Two other Canterbury Tales probably owe at least their inception to the Italian influences that we have been mentioning. The " Man of

Lawes Tale" is also an amplification of a Christian legend, treated in a more independent manner than that of St. Cecilia, but nevertheless conceived in the same mood (p. 153). The "Monkes Tale" derives rather from Boccaccio, but shows the influence of Dante in its sombre tone. It is a catalogue of the misfortunes of illustrious princes, and doubtless the various stories were composed at different times. One of them, the story of Count Ugolino, is taken from Dante, and has a touch of true and deep pathos (p. 157).

The metre in which the Life of St. Cecilia is written is the seven-line stanza, so frequently and beautifully employed by Chaucer elsewhere. Much discussion has arisen about the origin of this stanza, but we shall not err greatly if we ascribe its treatment in Chaucer's hands to the influence of his Italian models. He had before him two stanzas in which the Italian masters had achieved magical effects. The first of these is the *terza rima* of Dante, a melodious metre, imitated with success in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." The stanzas are of three lines each, with the interlacing rime-formula, *aba, bcb, cdc, ded,* and so on. Now, among Chaucer's poems is a certain "Compleynte to His Lady," which reads very much like an experiment in the possibilities of Italian metres. This indeed is its only interest; we read in it the poet's attempts to play an idle song upon a new instrument. Here are a few lines from "A

Compleynte to his Lady" in which he was trying the *terza rima*—with scanty success :

Now sothly, what she hight I wol reherse.
Hir name is Bountee, set in womanhede,
Sadnesse in youthe and Beautee prydèlees
And Plesaunce, under governaunce and drede ;
Her surname is eek Fairè Rewthèlees,
The Wyse, y-knit un-to Good Áventure,
That, for I love hir, she sleeth me giltèlees.
Hir love I best, and shal, whyl I may dure,
Bet than my-self an hundred thousand deel,
Than al this worldes richesse or crëature.
Now hath not Lovè me bestowèd weel
To lovè ther I never shal have part ?
Allas ! right thus is turnèd me the wheel,
Thus am I slayn with Lovès firy dart.
I can but love hir best, my swetè fo ;
Love hath me taught no more of his art
But serve alwey, and stintè for no wo.

Wisely did Chaucer determine to treat this metre with admiration, but not with the honour of imitation. Yet it will be observed, if the reader will turn to p. 33, that the verses there quoted from the " Clerkes Tale " are in six-line stanzas which are, as far as they go, rimed like the *terza rima*.

The second stanza that seems to have led to experimental work in versification by Chaucer is the *ottava rima* of Boccaccio, with its rime-formula *abababcc*. Now, Chaucer did not write in this identical metre ; but its use of the final couplet may well have determined his use

of the same device in his own peculiar stanza, while the omission of a line may have been suggested by the example of the French *balade*, in which seven or eight lines were employed interchangeably and in which the rime-formula was *ababbcbc*. An elimination of the last *a* rime from the *ottava rima* gives us Chaucer's seven-line stanza. However he may have reached his final effect, he was able to move in his stanza with a cadence and a melody as varied and as liquid as the Italians could command in theirs. It is of real interest to us to perceive Chaucer thus feeling his way to the perfection of his consummate weapon, and for that reason we mention here two of his minor poems in which various metres are, as it were, on trial.

The "Compleynte of Mars" belongs to some date between 1374 and 1380, and was written, it is said, by the command of John of Gaunt, the poet's consistent patron. The proem opens with an exordium to lovers in the form of a song welcoming the rising of Venus as a morning star on St. Valentine's day. This is a very pleasant piece of writing in the seven-line stanza. It is followed by a rendering in the same metre of the myth of Venus and Mars, in which the ancient legend is blended with the astrological lore surrounding the two deities; and then follows the complaint itself, in a nine-line stanza with the rime-formula *aabaabbcc*. Mars is the mirror of pure chivalrous love, and complains that the sun on its rising makes

it hopeless for him to see and attain Venus, the fair beauty whom he adores. The poem is interesting as a metrical experiment ; it is also interesting as a union of two of the poet's strongest intellectual tastes—those for mythology and astrology. But it is also a poem of scandal, and seems to be little more than an allegorical picture of a *liaison* between John of Gaunt's sister-in-law, the Duchess of York, and John Holland, afterward Earl of Huntingdon. Without some such reference the poem is undoubtedly obscure. With it we may read in it a clever *pièce d'occasion* written for the amusement of Chaucer's patron. If the Duke completely understood the poem, it is certainly a tribute to his general culture.

A more ambitious poem, but one conceived in the same general tone, is the "Compleynte of Faire Anelida and False Arcite." No doubt there is hidden in it some unknown reference to another courtly flirtation,—in which amusement King Edward and some of his sons were as active as the worst of their entourage,—but, if so, no hint of its exact location has come down to us. It is more interesting, however, as probably the first of Chaucer's direct studies in Boccaccio. That poet's ponderous epic of Thebes, the "Teseide," fascinated Chaucer's imagination ; and he seems to have commenced, perhaps even completed, a translation of it under the title of "Palamon and Arcite," which he discarded and recast in the "Knightes Tale." But the Arcite of the present poem is

not the Arcite of the "Knightes Tale," except in name. He is the type of the light-of-love, and it is the lady who has the complaint to make. She is clearly and nobly conceived, and her character lifts the poem on to a loftier level than the "Compleynte of Mars." It almost makes us forget the atmosphere of insincere formality in which the poem moves. For the clever verses are clearly an exercise, composed in obedience to some external suggestion, and cast in a fashionable mould. A certain dramatic force redeems them from the frigid unreality that menaces the pleasure of all such artificial exercises.

Anelida is the beautiful queen of Armenia, and is wooed by the gay young Theban noble Arcite. She does not permit herself to be lightly won; but, having given her heart, she does so without reserve and places complete faith in her lover. But he is unworthy of such as she. Having enjoyed the triumph of his good looks and courtly manners, he shows himself unable to appreciate what he has won; his vanity cannot be satisfied with an uneventful devotion; it demands a further display of his powers. His second love, however, gives him what he deserves—a lady who rules him with a masterful tyranny. This does not compensate Anelida, whose complaint is composed in a really lofty vein and reveals her as a fine example of womanhood. At the end of the complaint come two stanzas continuing the story; but, like so many of the poet's works,

this was left abruptly unfinished : perhaps he was already at work on the " Knightes Tale," which was to present the Theban legend in another light. The incomplete condition of the poem does not, however, take away our enjoyment of one of the best of Chaucer's earlier works. In its complex metrical form, intricately but carefully wrought, it may be fearlessly brought into comparison with the best Italian examples. As a piece of verse alone, it is one of Chaucer's most skilful poems.

These various experiments, suggested mainly by Chaucer's visits to Italy, were made almost certainly between 1372 and 1380, so that we may realize by this latter date the state of the poet's development fairly clearly. None of his greater works had yet been written, or even planned. At the age of forty he had barely reached the end of his apprenticeship. He was dependent upon translation and imitation for most of his work. Nevertheless he was managing to give an original impress to his borrowed material, and must have been even then regarded as one of the most considerable poets of the Middle Ages. Such a poem as the complaint of Anelida over Arcite, after all, is with all its shortcomings a great poem for 1380, and represents for England a new thing entirely—a new world discovered and successfully occupied. And as a metrist, as we have seen, Chaucer has already proved himself a master of liquid rhythm, far behind Dante, but little if at

all inferior to Petrarch or Boccaccio in his skilful manipulation of stanza and verse forms. This was much to have accomplished, but by far the best remained to come.

Glancing at his life during these years of busy production and study, we find that they were busy years in other respects also. They were years of honour and prosperity. In the year 1374, following his return from the mission to Genoa, he was on St. George's Day granted a pitcher of wine daily by the King himself. This grant was exchanged for an annual pension of about £200 (modern value) in 1377. A further acknowledgment of the King's favour came to him in June 1374, when he was appointed to the Comptrollership of the Customs of the Port of London. This office was a lucrative one, and its emoluments were swollen by occasional grants of forfeited articles detained for evasion of duty. But its conditions were onerous : the comptroller was expected to be always at his post, and to write the records of his work with his own hand. This, however, seems to have been rather a counsel of perfection than a rigid rule ; such records as have survived from Chaucer's period of office are not in his handwriting ; and he is known to have made several journeys abroad while drawing his salary from the Customs. The Customs House was no more than a modest dwelling-house on the riverside, consisting of two rooms—one below where the weighing apparatus was kept, and another above it to serve as counting-house.

Boatmen paraded the river to prevent smuggling, and doubtless Chaucer often joined them in their excursions, since his beat extended down the river as far as Gravesend. Such work as this, and the mechanical book-keeping that accompanied it, could not have been other than dreary to the pleasure-loving and imaginative poet ; but it brought him into contact with many human types, swept into the business net from all nations ; it kept him in touch with the active life of the time, with Italy and France, and contributed its colour to the more original elements in his genius. If the wools and fells of Flanders were of little interest to him, the wines of Italy may have made some compensation, and certainly their vendors did.

From May 1374 to 1386 Chaucer lived in the dwelling-house over Aldgate Gate, which he leased for a small sum from the Corporation of London. This gate was one of the fortified approaches to the city, and was about twenty minutes' walk from the Customs House. Hints from his poems have joined with traditional impressions to picture his life there as lonely ; on the other hand, some writers figure him as a married man living a snug bachelor life, while his wife served in the household of the Duchess of Lancaster. Certainly he and his wife received a joint pension from John of Gaunt for their services to the Duke, his Duchess, and his mother ; and equally certainly he must have been left a good deal to his own devices

during these years. But what we know of mediæval residences does not suggest a high standard of comfort, and we may safely surmise that Chaucer found little luxury in his home-life. What he spent his considerable income upon is not very clear ; but books at least were expensive, and travel must have been more so ; and the accessories of the life of a court attaché absorbed much too. There is every reason to think that Chaucer was a book-lover ; he had the scholar's interests, and in some respects his knowledge was both deep and wide. Moreover, his poems must have cost him a great deal of close work at this period ; they did not leave him much time for frivolity or exceptional gaiety ; and the picture of himself as the solitary student, in the "Hous of Fame," spending his days in a deadly routine and his nights in intellectual toil, is probably not far from the whole truth. Such distractions as he found were sought in the crowded city lanes or from the sunsets over the hills of Hampstead. That his wife played any important part in his higher life is unlikely ; that this higher life was present to the poet as a prevalent mood during his leisure hours the essential seriousness of his poems remains to show, in spite of the humour which so often plays upon their lines. Chaucer liked his draught of "corny ale" at the "Saracen's Head" ; he liked to listen to the broad tales of reeves, millers, shipmen and their like ; but he liked more often to retire to his lofty home and spend the midnight

hour engrossed in the figures of his astronomy, poring over the speculative dreams of Boëthius, or flying on wings of poesy to his glorious temple of Fame.

Several journeys abroad diversified the monotony of the time, and bear witness to his high reputation as a diplomatist and man of business. In 1376 he was attached to the mission of Sir John Burley on some unknown secret service. Next year he went with Sir Thomas Percy to Flanders, also on secret business ; and later he was engaged with two of the King's ambassadors in a futile attempt to negotiate a treaty with France. After the death of the old King in 1377, Chaucer's career continued along its prosperous lines. Early in 1378 he again went to France, and later on in the same year he was the companion of Sir Edward Berkeley in a mission to Milan, to treat with Barnabo Visconti, the "scourge of Lombardy," and the English condottiere, Sir John Hawkwood, who served Florence with success later on against the all-conquering Milanese. Barnabo had been suspected of causing the death by poison of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, in 1369, but what the nature of the present business was cannot be clearly stated. Certainly it was of a delicate character, and did not leave Chaucer so much freedom as he enjoyed on his earlier visit to Italy. Before he went, he had to obtain his customary royal warrant against his creditors ; it is interesting to note that one of the two friends whom he named to look after his affairs in his absence

was the poet John Gower. Chaucer received about £1000 in our money for his expenses during this mission; he had returned by February 1379, and was as far as we know never again employed on diplomatic service abroad. These travels had been of immeasurable value to the development of his genius; they had now served their turn, and it is well that there were no more. Apart from his ignorance of Greek, he had sapped the most important secrets of literary Europe. It remained for him to develop in its fullness the invaluable native strain in his genius.

The tale of Chaucer's material prosperity is not yet complete. His annual income was increased in 1382 by a new appointment—that of Comptroller of the Petty Customs of the Port of London. This office he was allowed to hand over to a deputy, and three years later the same privilege was given him in regard to his earlier comptrollership. Moreover, his wife received handsome gifts from her patroness on several occasions; add to this that the poet enjoyed the income of two profitable wardships for several years, and we have no difficulty in picturing the Chaucer household as reasonably wealthy. It ought to have been possible for a lonely poet with a small family to have managed very well on £1000 to £1200 a year; but the refrain of harassing circumstances and the pressure of persistent duns haunt every stage in Chaucer's career. We hear of his having to sue the Treasury for his own pension in 1380 or 1381,

and possibly his offices were not so lucrative as would appear on the surface during the mismanaged reign of Richard II. A little light of a misty and unpleasant sort is thrown upon his doings during these years by an incident which hints darkly at dishonourable conduct on his part. A certain Cecilia de Chaumpaigne in 1380 formally executed a legal deed absolving our poet from all liability *de meo raptu*. The mildest inference from this is the unflattering one that Chaucer was concerned in the forcible abduction of an heiress, either for his own benefit or for another's. In either case it suggests a kind of activity that consorts uncomfortably with those activities that produced his "Life of St Cecile" and the translation of Boëthius' "De Consolatione Philosophiæ" about the same time.

This latter work was the favourite book of philosophy in the Middle Ages and had attracted the attention of King Alfred, who is as much the father of English prose as Chaucer is of its poetry. Boëthius was the adviser and minister of the Emperor Theodoric (493–526); but, falling out of favour with his master, was overthrown and cast ignominiously into prison. In his confinement he wrote his book, depicting the difficulties with which his philosophy of life was beset by the freakish behaviour of Fortune. The book does not establish a new or original philosophy; it is a rather inconsistent blend of Christianity, Platonism, and pagan fatalism, satisfying to no one as a whole,

but expressing with dignity and feeling the ever-recurrent perplexities of the problems of Providence and Fate. It is full of serious reflections on the instability of earthly fortunes, on man's mistaken ideals of happiness, on the freedom of the will in its relation to divine providence ; and it is evident from Chaucer's poems that these and many similar thoughts found their way to the deeps of his nature. He had probably been brooding and indeed working long upon them before his translation was finished in 1381. Certainly, except Dante, no more serious influence entered his spirit than this from Boëthius.

The work is Chaucer's most important piece of prose. But apart from its historical interest, it would hardly attract attention on its own merits. Chaucer was not able to do for prose what he had done for poetry ; his prose has advanced very little beyond Alfred's, and the demand that he made upon it—of expressing a complex train of thought in lucid and well-balanced paragraphs—was beyond its fathom. The English would still seem, if we are to judge by this prose, to be a clumsy mould for thought ; in comparison with his verse, Chaucer's prose is a rushlight to the noonday sun. It is awkward, involved, irregular, abounding in inconvenient Latin idioms, uncertain in grammar, diffuse and rambling. It has not the merit of a promising or robust immaturity. Nevertheless we must be glad that Chaucer carried out his task to the end. The old philosopher does not lose all his

dignity in the unsuitable garb of Chaucer's prose ; the effort needed to render in definite form the lofty speculations was valuable to the poet by compelling him to master them, and at times to elucidate them by glosses of his own ; and we have therefore to read in this translation one of the chief formative influences of his poetical work.

The following short passage from the dialogue between the prisoner and his fair visitor, Philosophy, may serve as an example of Chaucer's best prose :

" This undirstonde I wel," quod I, " and I accorde me that it is ryght as thou seist, but I axe yif ther be any liberte of fre wille in this ordre of causes that clyven thus togidre in hem-self. Or elles I wolde witen yif that the destinal cheyne constrenith the moevynges of the corages of men."

" Yis," quod sche, " ther is liberte of fre wil. Ne ther ne was nevere no nature of resoun that it ne hadde liberte of fre wil. For every thing that may naturely usen resoun, it hath doom by whiche it discernith and demeth every thing ; thanne knoweth it by it-self thinges that ben to fleen and thinges that ben to desiren. And thilke thing that any wight demeth to ben desired, that axeth or desireth he ; and fleeth thilke thing that he troweth be to fleen. Wherfore in alle thingis that resoun is, in hem also is liberte of willynge and of nillynge. But I ne ordeyne nat (as who seith, I ne graunte nat) that this liberte be evenelyk in alle thinges. For-why in the sovereynes devynes substaunces (that is to seyn in spirites) jugement is more cleer, and wil nat I-corrumped, and myght redy to speden thinges that

ben desired. But the soules of men moten nedes be more fre whan thei loken hem in the speculacioun or lokynge of the devyne thought ; and lasse fre whan thei slyden in-to the bodyes ; and yit lasse fre whan thei ben gadrid to gidre and comprehended in erthli membres. But the laste servage is whan that thei ben yeven to vices and han I-falle fro the possessioun of hir propre resoun. For aftir that thei han cast awey hir eyghen fro the lyght of the sovereyn sothfastnesse to lowe thingis and derke, anon thei derken by the cloude of ignoraunce and ben troubled by felonous talentes ; to the whiche talentes whan thei approchen and assenten, thei hepen and encrecen the servage whiche thei han joyned to hem-self ; and in this manere thei ben caytifs fro hir propre liberte. The whiche thingis natheles the lokynge of the devyne purveaunce seth, that alle thingis byholdeth and seeth fro eterne, and ordeyneth hem everiche in here merites as thei ben predestinat ; and it is seid in Greke that 'alle thinges he seeth and alle thinges he herith.' "

IV

THE four years from 1382 to 1386 bring us into the sphere of Chaucer's great poetry in which, though he still displayed a great respect for distinguished forerunners, his originality is more manifest than the signs of imitation. He had become greater than all his models except Dante. Outward affairs still ran prosperously for him under the influence of John of Gaunt ; his position

was still almost equivalent to that of a mediæval laureate ; and when, in January 1382, Richard II was married to Princess Anne of Bohemia amid universal rejoicings, it was quite in the nature of things that Chaucer should give a national expression to the general feeling. This he did in one of the most charming and most finished of his compositions, "The Parlement of Foules."

The wooing of Princess Anne had been a prolonged matter, and its happy issue had been determined by considerations of State policy rather than by love. The lady had been previously betrothed to two young German princes, represented in the poem by two tercel eagles of inferior charm to the royal eagle who was destined to carry off the bride. The competition for the lady is delicately outlined in the poet's fable : the compliments to the King and his Queen alike are flattering but by no means fulsome, and free criticism is heard from all ranks of society. The poet leaves the lady's decision in abeyance ; but nature is represented as strongly on the side of the more distinguished wooer, and the young couple must have been delighted with the picture of their wooing given them by the poet. When court-poetry rises to this level of delight, which is very rarely the case, it is easy to forgive any strain on his sincerity that the poet may have had to make.

The structure of the poem is by no means independent of outside sources, though the

design built up with the borrowed materials surpasses anything of the kind that can be traced, and the details have a flavour of their own which requires no epicure in poetry to perceive. The poet himself says in apology for his use of old books :

> For ofte of oldė feeldės, as men seith,
> Cometh al this newė corn from yeer to yere,
> And out of oldė bookės, in good feith,
> Cometh al this newė science that men lere.

He is too modest. He may have obtained the idea of his parliament of birds from Alanus de Insulis (Aleyn), but their life, movement, and humorous delightfulness are his own. Dante, Boccaccio, Cicero, the "Roman de la Rose," send their notes through his lines ; but their echoes contain new harmonies from Chaucer's voice, which have enriched their quality enormously.

Almost inevitably the poem is a vision. The poet was reading with fascinated interest one of his favourite books—Cicero's "Somnium Scipionis" (Scipio's Dream). Reading and thinking over the matter of his book, he fell asleep in weariness ; and as he slept, he dreamt that the elder Scipio Africanus came to him and, in reward for his devotion, took him to a park enclosed by a wall of green stone. Leading him within, his guide conducted him through its lovely glades, amid its noble trees and beside its pleasant river ; and all was pleasant as Nature in her blithest mood. A number of

allegorical figures were scattered about the garden, but the chief glory was a gorgeous temple to Venus, where sat Bacchus and Ceres and the beautiful goddess of love herself. Inside the temple was many a broken bow, broken in honour of Diana by maidens like Atalanta and Dido, and lovers like Troilus, Hercules, and many more. Coming again into the open air, the dreamer was aware of a wondrous queen "fairer than any creature."

And here the poet must be allowed to tell his own tale to the end. The extract is somewhat long, but it is desirable that the reader should learn something of Chaucer's allegorical manner while he is at his best. It will be obvious that under the guise of birds the poet has outlined with his own rich and genial humour a series of vital human types. The formel eagle is of course the princess, and the three tercels her wooers ; while the squabbling cuckoo, goose, duck, and the rest stand as clearly for plebeian types of various kinds. The day is the feast of St. Valentine ; the birds must take their mates ; but Nature treats their noisy wooings with contempt, and nurses carefully her royal charge. It is difficult to say which is most admirable—the fresh delight of the descriptive stanzas, the true and subtle characterization, the delicate humour, or the keen perception of beauty which prevails everywhere. All these elements of good narrative poetry abound in this poem.

And in a launde upon an hille of flourès
Was set this noblė goddessė Nature.
Of braunchès were hir hallès and hir bourès
Y-wrought after hir craft and hir mesure ;
Ne there nas foul that cometh of engendrure,
That they ne werė prest in hir presence,
To take hir doom and yeve hir audience.

For this was on Seynt Valentynės day,
Whan every bryd cometh ther to chese his make,
Of every kyndė that men thynkė may ;
And that so huge a noysė gan they make,
That erthe and eyr and tre and every lake
So ful was, that unnethė was there space
For me to stonde, so ful was al the place.

And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde,[1]
Devyseth Nature of aray and face,
In swich aray men myghtėn hir ther fynde.
This noble empėressė, ful of grace,
Bad every foul to take his ownė place,
As they were wont alwey fro yeer to yere
Seynt Valentynės day to stonden there.

That is to seyn, the foulės of ravyne
Were hyest set, and than the foulės smale,
That eten as hem nature wolde enclyne,
As worm or thyng, of whiche I telle no tale ;
And water-foul sat lowest in the dale,
But foul that lyveth by seed sat on the grene,
And that so fele that wonder was to sene.

There myghtė men the royal egle fynde,
That with his sharpė look perséth the sonne ;

[1] Referring to "Planctus Naturæ" of Alanus de Insulis (12th century).

And other eglès of a lower kynde,
Of whiche that clerkès wel devysè cunne.
Ther was the tyraunt with his fethrès donne
And greye, I mene the goshauk that doth pyne
To bryddès for his outrageous ravyne.

The gentil faucon that with his feet distreyneth
The kyngès hond ; the hardy sperhauk eke,
The quaylès foo ; the merlion that peyneth
Hym-self ful ofte the larkè for to seke ;
There was the douvè, with hir eyèn meke ;
The jalous swan, ayens his deth that syngeth ;
The oule eke, that of deth the bodè bryngeth ;

The crane the gëaunt, with his trompès soune ;
The theef the chough, and eek the jangelyng pye ;
The scornynge jay ; the elès foo, the heroune ;
The falsè lapwyng, ful of trecherye ;
The starè, that the counseyl can be-wrye ;
The tamè ruddok, and the coward kyte ;
The cok, that orloge is of thorpès lyte ;

The sparwè, Venus sone ; the nyhtyngale,
That clepeth forth the grenè levès newe ;
The swalow, mortrer of the flyès smale,
That maken hony of flourès fresshe of hewe ;
The wedded turtel, with hire hertè trewe,
The pecok, with his aungels fethrès bright ;
The fesaunt, scorner of the cok by nyght ;

The waker goos ; the cukkow ever unkynde ;
The popynjay, ful of delicasye ;
The drakè, stroyer of his ownè kynde ;
The stork, the wreker of avouterye ;

The hotė cormeraunt of glotenye ;
The raven wys ; the crow, with vois of care ;
The throstel old ; the frosty feldėfare.

What shulde I seyn ? Of foulės every kynde
That in this world han fethrės and stature,
Men myghtėn in that place assembled fynde
Before the noble goddessė Nature.
And everich of hem did his besy cure
Benygnėly to chese or for to take
By hir acord his formel or his make.

But to the poynt,—Nature held on hir hond
A formel egle, of shap the gentiléste
That ever she a-mong hire werkės fond ;
The moste benygnė and the goodliéste ;
In hir was every vertu at his reste
So ferforth, that Nature hir-selfe hadde blisse
To loke on hir and ofte hir bek to kisse.

Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
That hoot, cold, hevy, light, and moist, and dreye
Hath knyt, with evenė noumbrės of a-cord,
In esy vois began to speke and seye,
"Foulės, tak hede of my sentence, I preye,
And, for your ese in furtheryng of your nede,
As faste as I may speke I wol me speede.

"Ye know wel how seynt Valentynės day,
By my statut and through my governaunce,
Ye comen for to chese—and flee your way—
Your makės, as I prike yow with plesaunce ;
But nathėles my rightful ordėnaunce
May I nat lete for al this world to wynne,
That he that most is worthy shal begynne.

" The tercel egle, as that ye knowèn wel,
The foul royal, a-bove yow in degree,
The wyse and worthy, secree, trewe as stel,
The which I have y-formed, as ye may see,
In every part as it best liketh me,—
Hit nedeth not his shap yow to devyse,—
He shal first chese and spekèn in his gyse.

" And after him by order shul ye chese,
After your kyndè, everich as yow lyketh,
And as your hap is shul ye wynne or lese ;
But which of yow that lovè most entriketh
God sende him hir that sorest for him syketh."
And therwithal the tercel gan she calle,
And seyde, " My sone, the choys is to thee falle.

" But nathèles, in this condicioun
Mot be the choys of everich that is here,
That she a-gree to his eleccioun,
Who-so he be that shuldè be hir fere ;
This our usage alwey from yeer to yere,
And who-so may at this tyme have his grace,
In blisful tyme he com into this place."

With hed enclynèd and with humblè chere
This royal tercel spak, and taried nought :
" Un-to my sovereyn lady, and nought my fere—
I chese, and chese with wille and herte and thought,
The formel on your hond, so wel y-wrought,
Whos I am al and ever wol hir serve,
Do what hir list, to do me live or sterve.

" Besechyng hir of mercy and of grace,
As she that is my lady sovereyne ;

Or let me dyė present in this place ;
For certės, longe I may nat live in payne,
For in myn herte is corven every veyne ;
And havyng réward only to my trouthe,
My derė herte have of my wo som routhe !

" And if that I to hir be founde untrewe,
Disobeysaunt, or wilful negligent,
Avauntour, or in proces love anewe,
I preye to yow this be my jugėment,
That with these foulės be I al to-rent,
That ilkė day that ever she me fynde
To hir untrewe, or in my gilt unkynde.

" And, syn that noon loveth hir so wel as I,
Al be she never of lovė me behette,
Than oughtė she be myn thourgh hir mercy,
For other bond can I noon on hir knette ;
Ne never for no wo ne shal I lette
To serven hir, how fer so that she wende ;
Say what yow list, my tale is at an ende."

Right as the fresshė, redė rosė newe
A-yen the somer sonnė coloured is,
Right so for shame al wexėn gan the hewe
Of this formel. Whan she herde al this,
She neyther answerdė " Wel," ne seyde amys,
So sore abasshed was she, til that Nature
Seyde, " Doughter, dred yow nought, I yow assure."

Another tercel egle spak anoon,
Of lower kynde, and seyde, " That shal not be !
I love hir bet than ye do, by Seynt John !
Or attė leste I love as wel as ye,

And lenger have servèd hir in my degree ;
And if she shulde have loved for long lovyng,
To me allone hadde been the guerdonyng.

" I dar eek seyn, if she me fyndè fals,
Unkynde, janglere, or rebel any wyse,
Or jalous, do me hangen by the hals !
And, but I berè me in hir servyse,
As wel as that my wit can me suffyse,
Fro poynt to poynt hir honour for to save,
Tak she my lif and al the good I have."

The thriddè tercel egle answérdè tho,
" Now, sirs, ye seen the litel leyser here,
For every foul cryeth out to ben a-go
Forth with his make, or with his lady dere,
And eek Nature hir-self ne wol not here,
For tarying here, not half that I wolde seye,
And but I speke I mot for sorwè deye.

" Of long servyse avaunte I me nothing
But as possible is me to deye to-day
For wo, as he that hath ben languysshyng
Thise twenty winter, and wel happen may
A man may servèn bet and more to pay
In half a yer, although it were no more
Than som man doth that hath servèd ful yore.

" I ne sey not this by me, for I ne can
Don no servyse that may my lady plese ;
But I dar seyn I am hir trewest man,
As to my dom, and feynest wolde hir ese ;
At shortè wordès, til that deth me sese,
I wol ben hirès, whether I wake or wynke,
And trewe in al that hertè may bethynke."

Of al my lyf syn that day I was born
So gentil ple in love or other thyng
Ne herdė never no man me beforn,
Who-so that haddė leyser and cunnyng
For to reherse hir chere and hir spekyng :
And from the morwė gan this spechė laste
Til dounward drow the sonnė wonder faste.

The noyse of foulės for to ben delyverėd
So loudė rong, " Have doon and let us wende ! "
That wel wende I the wode hadde al to-shyverėd.
" Come of ! " they cryde, " allas, ye wil us shende !
Whan shal your cursed pleyng have an ende ?
How shulde a jugė eyther party leve
For yee or nay, with-outen any preve ? "

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also,
So cryden, " Kek, kek ! " " Kokkow ! " " Quek,
quek ! " hye,
That thurgh myn eres the noysė wentė tho.
The goos seyde, " Al this nys not worth a flye !
But I can shape hereof a remedye,
And I wol sey my verdit faire and swythe,
For water-foul, who-so be wrooth or blythe."

" And I for worm-foul ! " quod the fol cokkow ;
" And I wol of myn owne autoritė,
For comun sped take on the chargė now,—
For to delyvere us is gret charitė."
" Ye may abyde a whilė yet, *pardė* ! "
Seidė the turtil, " if it be your wille
A wight may speke, him were as fayr be stille."

" I am a seed-foul, oon the unworthieste,
That wot I wel, and litel of cunnynge,

But bet is that a wyghtès tongė reste,
Than entrėmetėn him of swiche doynge
Of which he neyther redė can, ne synge ;
And who-so doth, ful foule himself acloyeth,
For office uncommytted ofte anoyeth."

Naturė, which that alway hadde an ere
To murmur of the lewėdnes behynde,
With facound voyse seyde, " Hold your tungės there !
And I shal sone, I hope, a conseyl fynde,
Yow to delyvere, and fro this noyse unbynde.
I juge, of every flok men shal oon calle
To seyn the verdit for yow foulės alle."

Assentėd were to this conclusioun
The briddės alle ; and foulės of ravyne
Han chosen first, by playn eleccioun,
The tercelet of the faucon, to diffyne
Al hir sentence as him list to termyne ;
And to Nature him gonnėn to presente,
And she accepteth him with glad entente.

The tercelet seidė then in this manère :
" Ful hard were hit to prevėn by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formel here,
For everich hath swich replicacioun
That noon by skillės may be brought adoun ;
I can not se that arguments avayle ;
Than semeth hit ther mustė be batayle."

" Al redy ! " quod these eglės tercels tho.
" Nay, sirs," quod he, " if that I dorste it seye
Ye doon me wrong, myn tale is not y-do,
For sirs, ne taketh nought a-gref, I preye,

It may not gon, as ye wolde, in this weye ;
Oure is the voys that han the charge in honde,
And to the jugės dome ye moten stonde ;

" And therfor, pes ! I seye, as to my wit,
Me woldė thynke how that the worthieste
Of knyghthode, and lengest hath usėd hit,
Moste of estat, of blod the gentileste,
Were sittyngest for hir, if that hir leste,
And of these thre she wot hir-self, I trowe,
Which that he be, for hit is light to knowe."

The water-foulės han her hedės leyd
Togedre, and of a short avysėment,
Whan everich hadde his largė golee seyd,
They seyden sothly, al by oon assent,
How that the " goos, with hir facoundė gent,
That so desyreth to pronounce our nede,
Shal telle our tale," and preyden " god hir spede."

And for these water-foulės tho began
The goos to speke, and in hir kakelynge
She seydė, " Pees ! now tak keep every man,
And herkeneth which a resoun I shal brynge ;
My wit is sharp, I love no taryinge ;
I seye, I rede him, though he were my brother,
But she wol love him let him take another."

" Lo here ! a perfit resoun of a goos ! "
Quod tho the sperhauke, " never mot she the !
Lo, sich it is to have a tungė loos !
Now pardė, fool, yet were it bet for the
Han holde thy pes, than shewed thy nyceté !
It lyth nat in his wit, nė in his wille,
But sooth is seyd, ' a fool can noght be stille.' "

The laughter aroos of gentil foulès alle,
And right a-noon the seed-foul chosen hadde
The turtel trewe, and gunne hir to hem calle
And preyden hir to seyn the sothè sadde
Of this matere, and askèd what she radde.
And she answérde, that pleynly hir entente
She woldè shewe, and sothly what she mente.

"Nay, god forbede a lover shuldè chaunge!"
The turtel seyde, and wex for shamè red;
"Though that his lady ever more be straunge,
Yet let him serven hir til he be deed.
Forsothe I preysè noght the goosès reed,
For though she deyede I wol non other make,
I wol ben hires til that the deth me take!"

"Wel bourdèd," quod the dokè, "by my hat!
That men shul lovèn alwey, causèles,
Who can a resoun fynde, or wit in that?
Daunceth he mury that is myrthèles?
Who shuldè recche of that is recchèles?
Ye, kek!" yit seyde the gos, ful wel and fayre,
"There been mo sterrès, god wot, than a payre!"

"Now fy, cherl!" quod the gentil tercèlet,
"Out of the donghil com that word ful right,
Thou canst not see what thyng is wel be-set;
Thow farest by love as oulès doon by light,
The day hem blent, but wel they sen by nyght;
Thy kynde is of so lowe a wrechednesse,
That what love is thow canst nat see ne gesse."

Tho gan the cukkow put him forth in prees
For foul that eteth worm, and seydè blythe,
"So I," quod he, "may have my make in pees

I recchė nat how longė that ye stryve ;
Lat ech of hem be soleyn al hir lyve ;
This is my reed, syn they may not acorde,
This shortė lessoun nedeth not recorde."

" Ye ! have the glotoun fild y-nogh his paunche,
Than are we wel," seydė the merlioun ;
" Thow mordrer of the heysugge on the braunche
That broghte thee forth ! thou [rewthėlees] glotoun !
Live thou soleyn, wormės corrupcioun !
For no fors is of lakke of thy nature !
Go, lewėd be thou, while the world may dure ! "

" Now pees," quod Nature, " I comaundė here !
For I have herd al your opynyoun,
And in effect yet be we never the nere ;
But fynally, this my conclusioun,—
That she hir-self shal han the electioun
Of whom hir list, who-so be wrooth or blythe,
Him that she cheseth, he shal hir han as swythe ;

" For syn it may not here discussėd be
Who loveth hir best, as seyde the tercėlet,
Than wol I don hir this favour, that she
Shal han right him on whom hir herte is set,
And he hir that his herte hath on hir knet,
Thus juge I, Nature, for I may not lye
To non estat, I have non othir ÿe.

" But as for conseyl for to chese a make,
If I were Resoun, certės than wolde I
Conseylė yow the royal tercel take,
As seyde the tercėlet ful skylfully,
As for the gentilest and most worthy
Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce
That to yow oughtė been a suffisaunce."

With dredful vois the formel hir answerde :
" Myn rightful lady, goddesse of Nature,
Soth is that I am ever under your yerde,
Like as is everich other creature,
And mot ben yourės whil my lyf may dure ;
And therfor graunteth me my firstė bone,
And myn entent I wol yow seyn right sone."

" I graunte it yow," quod she, and right a-non
This formel egle spak in this degre :
" Almyghty quene, unto this yer be gon
I askė rėspit for to a-visė me,
And after that to have my choys al fre ;
This al and som that I wol speke and seye ;
Ye gete no more al-though ye do me deye.

" I wol not servėn Venus ne Cupide,
For sothe as yet, by no manėrė weye."
" Now, syn it may non otherweys betyde,"
Quod tho Nature, " here is no more to seye ;
Than wolde I that these foulės were a-weye,
Ech with his make, for tarying lenger here,"—
And seyde hem thus, as ye shul after here.

" To you speke I, ye tercelets," quod Nature
" Beth of good herte and serveth, alle thre ;
A yeer nis nat so longė to endure,
And ech of yow peyne him in his degrė
For to do well ; for, God wot, quit is she
Fro you this yeer ; what after so be-falle ;
This entremės is dressėd for you alle."

And whan this werk al broght was to an ende,
To every foulė Nature yaf his make
By even acorde, and on hir wey they wende ;

And, Lord, the blisse and joyė that they make !
For ech gan other in his wyngės take,
And with hir nekkės ech gan other wynde,
Thankyng alwey the noble quene of kynde.

But first were chosen foulės for to synge,
As, yeer be yere, was alwey hir usance
To synge a roundel at hir departynge,
To don to Nature honour and plesaunce.
The note, I trowe, y-makėd was in Fraunce ;
The wordės were swiche as ye may here fynde
The nextė vers, as I now have in mynde.

" Now welcom, somer, with thy sonnė softe,
That hast this wintrės weders overshake
And driven a-wey the longė nyghtės blake ;

Seynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on lofte,
Thus syngėn smalė foulės for thy sake
Now welcom, somer, with thy sonnė softe,
That hast this wintrės weders overshake.

Wele han they causė for to gladėn ofte,
Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make ;
Ful blisful mowe they ben when they awake.
Now welcom, somer, with thy sonnė softe,
That hast this wintrės weders overshake
And driven a-wey the longė nyghtės blake ; "

And with the showtyng whan the song was do
That foulės madėn at hir flight awey,
I wook, and other bokės tok me to,
To rede up-on ; and yet I rede alwey ;
In hope y-wys to redė so sum day,
That I shall metė somthyng for to fare
The bet ; and thus to rede I nyl not spare.

The "Parlement of Foules" is, as will be seen, a finished work of art, not a lordly fragment like most of Chaucer's later poems. In this respect, it is in the same rank as "Troilus and Criseyde," which seems to have been completed about the year 1385. It appears that John of Gaunt was interested in the story of Troilus; certainly it was well calculated to consort with his varied tastes and doings; and possibly Chaucer was encouraged in his great work by the stimulus of his patron. For "Troilus and Criseyde" is a great work, richer by far than anything the poet had yet done. It is his longest single poem, extending to more than 8000 lines; but apart from that, it is a work of elevated design and masterly finish in detail—a work which called for high qualities of patience and sympathy as well as an exquisite poetic skill. Chaucer shows here that he was equal to the task of planning and carrying out a big work in a style worthy of the conception.

Again we have to record that the work was not original. It is undoubtedly based upon Boccaccio's telling of the same story in his "Filostrato." In parts indeed it is little more than an expanded translation of that poem. But it is a translation which, while keeping to the outline of the plot, has transformed its spirit by giving a fuller dramatic interest to the characters. Moreover, it is written in the English rather than the Italian spirit. Its tone is not cynical or licentious, but earnest and modest, and its leading characters are something

more than the illicit lovers of Boccaccio. It has a solid seriousness as the basis of its interest, and does not begin and end in superficial charm. To the Italian's grace Chaucer has added chivalry and lofty character. It is thus that a man of genius transforms the borrowed work of an inferior writer—equally clever perhaps, but deficient in true insight into man's nobler self.

The story of Troilus does not come from Homer, though Cressida probably is the descendant of Briseis, the woman who caused the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, modified by the play of romantic imagination during the dark ages when Homer was only indirectly known. Chaucer himself refers to an authority, Lollius, about whom nothing is discoverable : he may be disguising Boccaccio under this name, or he may be mistranslating a passage in Horace.[1] Anyhow, Boccaccio is his authority entirely, and Boccaccio probably told his light tale from general knowledge—the story having been first put together by Benoît de Ste. More, a troubadour of the twelfth century. It was Benoît who first gave a distinct individuality to the character of Cressida.

Troilus was one of Priam's heroic sons, a warrior who at first speaks scornfully of love and all its dallyings. But, unfortunately for him, one day he sees Cressida in her widow's garb, and is at once sore stricken. Aided by

[1] Trojani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli,
Dum tu declamas Romæ, Præneste relegi.
Epistles, i. 2.

his friend Pandarus, who is also Cressida's uncle, he is at length able to communicate with his lady, and afterward to become known to her. She accepts his attentions, after a becoming interval of hesitation; for a short while Troilus is at the summit of felicity. But Cressida is a Greek, and Fate rules that she must be exchanged for Antenor, a Trojan warrior who had been taken prisoner. With many vows of loyalty, Cressida returns to her countrymen, leaving Troilus a monument of grief and despair, but promising to return to him within ten days. Another wooer, the handsome and crafty Diomede, prevents this; Cressida is betrothed to her new lover; and many Greeks will suffer for her faithlessness. For Troilus fights now with a fierce courage, seeking Diomede and dealing death to hundreds, until he is himself overthrown by Achilles and thus released from his bitter torments.

This, in the briefest outline, is the story told both by Chaucer and by Boccaccio, with the fullness of detail and ornament characteristic of their individual tastes. It is obviously a story which lends itself readily to cynical and licentious treatment, if the author be so minded, and this Boccaccio was. Cressida is in his hands merely the personification of feminine fickleness; her love is wholly sensuality, untouched by refinement or modesty; and it was the unpleasant details of her love upon which the Italian mind, as represented by Boccaccio, preferred to dwell. But in Chaucer, Cressida is a

dramatic creation, a woman, weak but not wholly unworthy of Troilus' love. She is drawn with a careful art, such as Shakespeare in his drama on the theme has not surpassed—has not indeed reached at all. Her weakness is there, but it is almost condoned by its consistency with her character ; it is not dwelt upon, as if it were the essential thing in her. For she does not yield to Troilus immediately. Indeed it is by no means certain that she really loved him at all. She finds him a fine heroic figure of a man, a lover whom it is not disgraceful to have wooing her ; but passion in the true sense she does not show. The insistent craft of Pandarus and his worldly wisdom aid the brave appearance and headstrong love of Troilus in overcoming her heart ; but its deeps were never stirred, and her ready acceptance of Diomede is thus psychologically accounted for. In short, Chaucer's Cressida is treated so sympathetically, and with so much refinement, that she is by no means the byword of scorn that others have made her ; if she does not arouse our love, she does not bestir our contempt ; she is not merely the butt of the moralist, but a woman who cannot stand strong against the artillery with which love, pleasure, and worldly wisdom have assaulted her.

The character of Troilus, too, has been made more refined by Chaucer, but he is not allowed to run away with all our sympathy. He has most of the qualities of the hero of chivalry—his martial skill, his dauntless courage, his love

of fine dress, his complete abandonment to his passion, once it has caught him. He knows no moderation in any of his actions : it is either the heaven of victory, or the bottomless pit of despair—with him there is no middle course. His love for Cressida is absolute—a fire which cannot be extinguished, a madness which achievement itself hardly allays. He cannot endure the world if Cressida is unfaithful ; assured that she is, he can only die. But he must die like a hero worthy of his great love. Chaucer does not permit him to remain in our mind as an idle trifler, dallying with an unpleasant intrigue and lulled in vague amorous sentimentality. This would degrade both him and Cressida. He is not a mere symbol upon which to hang an allegory of womanly fickleness ; but a young man, of hot blood and strong feeling, whose heroism is streaked with the defects of his virtues. Like Cressida, he relies on Pandarus, who delights in the scheming that is necessary to bring the lovers together. That clever old worldling does not understand the forces with which he is dealing, though he thinks he does. His conversations with the hero and heroine give the poet the opportunity of dealing some of his shrewdest strokes ; he says all that can be said, not to dissuade them from their meeting, but to make it appear commonplace ; he overcomes the difficulties in their way, and leaves them to enjoy their love, with the twinkle of the hardened roué in his eye ; his irony, his good-humour, his kindliness,

his easy philosophy of life, combine to make the sordid part he plays as pleasant as it could be made. Chaucer showed fine taste as well as acute sense in making Pandarus the middle-aged uncle of Cressida, instead of the young cousin, as Boccaccio did. His artfulness and address, both very necessary in dealing with Chaucer's Cressida, would have sat very cynically on a young man's character.

The foregoing remarks carry the suggestion that Chaucer in "Troilus and Criseyde" had developed to a very high pitch his native gift for dramatic narrative. The poem is a long one, but the interest does not flag, owing to the strong character-drawing. Its workmanship is astonishingly even, and one hardly knows where to select a representative passage—whether from the love scenes, or from the monodies, or from the pleasant descriptions, or from the philosophical bypaths, or from the humorous dialogue. All parts are good, and the reader can only realize the extent and variety of Chaucer's powers by reading a longer extract than we can find space for. To escape from our quandary, we give the remarkably interesting closing passage. Here he refers us to others who have treated the Trojan story. He pleads with those who may copy his poem hereafter that they be careful not to miswrite or "mismetre" it, conscious that the English language was then in a fluid state, and his own verses a very novel thing in a day when "Piers Plowman" was being written under very different

rules. With sure art, he does not prolong his story beyond the tragic end in order to tell the deeds of Troilus. And finally, he parts company completely with Boccaccio in the elevated tone of his close. The refuge from the vanity of human love is to seek the higher and transcendent love of God. In this spirit he dedicates his poem, not to his patron or to the gay King, but to his friend and fellow-poet, "the moral Gower," and to "philosophical Strode." He wants his poem to be taken very seriously.

—Go, litel book! Go, litel myn tragédie!
Ther God thy maker yit, or-that he dye,
So sendė might to make in som comédie![1]
But, litel book, no making thou n'envýe,[2]
But subgit be to allė poesye!
And kis the steppės wher-as thou seest pace
Virgíle, Ovíde, Omér, Lucán, and Stace!

And, for ther is so gret diversité
In Englissh and in writing of our tonge,
So prey to God that non miswritė thee,
Ne thee mismetrė for defaute of tonge!
And, red wher-so thou be or ellės songe,
That thou be understondė God biseche!—
But yet to purpos of my rather speche.

—The wraththe, as I bigan you for to seye,
Of Troilus the Grekės boughten dere;
For thousandės his hondės maden deye,
As he that was withouten any pere

[1] "Go my little tragedy! So may God yet send thy maker power to have a hand in some comedy ere he die."
[2] "Envy no other poetry (making)."

Save Ector in his time, as I can here.
But weylawey, save only Goddès wille,
Ful pitously him slough the fierse Achille.

And whan that he was slayn in this manére
His lightè goost ful blisfully is went
Up to the holwnesse of the eightè spere,
In convers leting everich element :
And ther he saugh with ful avisèment
Th'erratik sterrès, herkning armonye
With sounès fulle of hevenissh melodye.[1]

And down from thennès faste he gan avise
This litel spot of erthe that with the see
Embracèd is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanité
To réspect of the pleyne felicite
That is in hevene above. And at the laste,
Ther he was slayn his loking down he caste,

And in himself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepen for his deth so faste,
And dampned al our werk, that folwen so
The blindè lust the whiche that may not laste,
And sholden al our herte on hevenè caste.
And forth he wentè, shortly for to telle,
Ther-as Mercúrie sorted him to dwelle.

Swich fyn hath tho this Troilus for love !
Swich fyn hath al his gretè worthinesse !
Swich fyn hath his estat rèál above !

[1] A difficult stanza. It means that his spirit passed through the seven spheres of the sun, moon and planets (erratic stars) and came to the hollow side of the eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars. *In convers letyng* means "leaving each sphere on the convex side," *i.e.* leaving them behind. As it went, the spirit heard the harmony of the spheres.

Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse !
Swich fyn, this falsė worldės brotelnesse !—
And thus bigan his loving of Criseyde
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.

—O yongė fresshė folkės, he or she,
In whiche ay love up-groweth with your age,
Repeireth hom fro worldly vanité !
And of your herte up-casteth the viságe
To th'ilkė God that after his imáge
You made ; and thinketh al n'is but a faire
This world, that passeth sone as flourės faire !

And loveth Him, the whiche that right for love
Upon a cros, our soulės for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above ;
For He n'il falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al hoolly on him leye !
And sin He best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feynėd lovės for to seke ?

Lo here, of payens corsėd oldė rites !
Lo here, what alle hir Goddės may availe !
Lo here, thise wrecched worldės appetites !
Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaile
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaile !
Lo here, the forme of oldė clerkės speche
In poetrye, if ye hir bokės seche !

—O moral Gowėr, this book I directe
To thee, and to thee, philosophical Strode,
To vouchen-sauf, ther nede is, to correcte,
Of your benignėtės and zelės gode.—
And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte, of mercy evere I preye,
And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye :

Thou oon, and two, and three, eterne onlive,
That regnest ay in three and two and oon,
Uncircumscript, and al mayst circumscrive,
Us from visíble and ínvisible foon
Defende ! And to thy mercy, everichoon,
So make us, Jesus, for thy mercy digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne !

In the first stanza just quoted, it will be observed that Chaucer prays that, after the strain of the over-serious tragedy, he may be permitted "to make in som comedie." Professor Ten Brink, one of Chaucer's most learned nineteenth-century friends, saw in this a reference to the "Hous of Fame," to which poem the poet seems to have turned for a little lighter exercise. Not that it is lacking in serious intention: on the contrary, it is a lofty allegory, modelled to a large extent upon Dante's "Divine Comedy" and indebted to the Italian masterpiece for a great many details and thoughts. But a vein of humour runs through it which arises from the fundamental difference between the two men. Dante in undertaking his pilgrimage has left the world behind; Paradise is his goal. Chaucer, on the other hand, remains a man among men; when his guide to the Temple of Fame offers to teach him the divine knowledge of the stars, he declines: "I am now too old," he says in excuse, but his real reason is his interest in the affairs and characters of men. This difference almost makes the "Hous of Fame" a parody of Dante. But there is

another serious aspect of the poem which prevents this.

Beginning with a talk on dreams, the poet proceeds to tell how once he saw in his sleep a wonderful, glittering temple of glass adorned with many a precious stone. It is a temple of Venus. A series of images fixed to the wall serves the poet as an excuse for narrating a few episodes from the "Æneid"; then he comes outside, to see around him nothing but a sandy wilderness. In this vision Chaucer figures the world of his ideals, beautiful, but solitary and insubstantial; while all around it lies the dreary monotony of his daily life. At this point an eagle swoops down upon him, takes him up lightly, and soars with him toward the stars. To the astonished poet, who had begun to fear that his fate was to be that of Enoch or of Romulus, the eagle addressed comforting words.

Lo! this was tho my fantasye!
But he that bar me gan espye
That I so thoghte, and seydė this:
"Thow demest of thy-self amys;
For Jovės is not theraboute,—
I dar wel putte thee out of doute,—
To make of thee as yit a sterre.
But er I bere thee mochė ferre,
I wol thee tellė what I am,
And whider thou shalt, and why I cam
To donė this, so that thou take
Good herte, and not for ferė quake."
"Gladly," quod I. "Now wel," quod he:

" First, I, that in my feet have thee,
Of which thou haste a feer and wonder,
And dwellyng with the god of thonder,
Which that men callèn Jupiter,
That dooth me flee ful oftè fer
To do al his comaundèment.
And for this cause he hath me sent
To thee : now herkè, by thy trouthe !
Certeyn he hath of thee routhe,
That thou so longè trewèly
Hast servèd so ententifly
His blindè nevew Cupido,
And fair [dame] Venús also,
Withoutè guerdoun ever yit,
And neverthelesse hast set thy wyt—
Although that in thy heed ful lyte is—
To makè bookès, songes, or dytees,
In ryme, or ellès in cadence,
As thou best canst in reverence
Of Love, and of his servants eke,
That have his servyse soght, and seke ;
And peynest thee to preyse his arte,
Although thou haddest never part ;
Wherfor, al-so God me blesse,
Jovès halt hit greet humblesse,
And vertu eek, that thou wolt make
A-nyght ful ofte thyn heed to ake,
In thy studie so thou writest,
And evermo of love enditest,
In honour of him and preisynges,
And in his folkès furtherynges,
And in hir matere al devysest,
And noght him nor his folk despisest,
Although thou maist go in the daunce
Of hem that him list not avaunce.

" Wherfor, as I seyde, y-wys,
Jupiter considereth wel this ;
And also, beau sir, other thynges ;
That is, that thou hast no tydynges
Of Lovès folk, if they be glade,
Ne of nothyng ellès that God made ;
And noght only fro fer contree,
That ther no tydyng cometh to thee,
But of thy verray neyghèbores
That dwellen almost at thy dores,
Thou herest neither that ne this ;
For when thy labour doon al is,
And hast y-maad thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newé thynges,
Thou gost hoom to thy hous anoon,
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another boke,
Til fully daswèd is thy looke,
And lyvest thus as an herèmyte,
Although thyn abstynence is lyte.
" And therfor Jovès, through his grace,
Wol that I bere thee to a place,
Which that hight the Hous of Fame,
To do thee som disport and game,
In som recompensacioun
Of labour and devocioun
That thou hast had, lo ! causèles,
To Cupido the recchèles.
And thus this god, through his merite,
Wol with som maner thyng thee quyte,
So that thou wolt be of good chere.
For trustè wel that thou shalt here,
When we be comèn ther I seye,
Mo wonder thyngès, dar I leye,
Of Lovès folkè mo tidynges,

Both sothè sawès and lesynges ;
And moo lovès newe begonne,
And longe y-servèd lovès wonne ;
And mo lovès casuelly
That been betid, no man wot why,
But 'as a blynd man stert an hare' ;
And more jolytee and well-fare,
Whil that they fynden love of stele,
As thinketh hem, and over-al wele :
Mo discords, and mo jelousyes,
Mo murmurs, and mo novelryes
And mo dissymulaciouns,
And feynèd reparaciouns ;
And mo berdès in two houres—
Withoutè rasour or sisoures—
Y-maad, then greynès be of sondes ;
And eek mo holdyng in hondes,
And also mo renovelaunces
Of olde forletèn aqueyntaunces ;
Mo lovè-dayès, and acordes,
Then on instruments ben cordes ;
And eek of lovès mo eschaunges,
Than ever cornès were in graunges ;
Unethè maistow trowen this ? "
Quod he. "No, helpe me God so wys ! "
Quod I. "No ? why ? " quod he. "For hit
Were impossible to my wyt,
Though that Fame hadde al the pies
In al a realme, and al the spies,
How that yet she shulde here all this,
Or they espie hit." "O yis, yis ! "
Quod he to me, "that can I preve
By resoun, worthy for to leve,
So that thou yeve thyn advertence
To understondè my sentence.

" First shalt thou herèn where she dwelleth,
And so thyn ownè book hit telleth,
Hir paleys stant, as I shal seye
Right even a-myddès of the weye,
Betwixen hevene, erthe, and see ;
That whatsoever in al these three
Is spoken in privee or aperte,
The wey therto is so overte,
And stant eek in so juste a place,
That every soun mot to hit pace,
Or what so cometh fro any tonge,
Be hit rounèd, red, or songe,
Or spoke in suertee or in drede,
Certeyn hit mostè thider nede."

From this passage it will be seen that the eagle promises Chaucer a holiday from his hard toil. The picture of himself at his dreary reckonings at the Customs house, then at home sitting " dumb as any stone " over his books, then going forth because " thyn abstinence is lyte," is one of the most intimately personal in Chaucer. And why does he do this ?

That last infirmity of noble mind

has him in thrall ; Fame is the lure. Then let him visit her temple, and see how the goddess deals out her boons. To that temple the eagle will guide the dreamer, where every sound on earth is heard and reveals the man or woman who uttered it.

The eagle brought the poet to a precipitous rock of crystal, and then left him to make the rest of his way alone. Climbing over the rock,

he found it to be made of ice, in which were engraved the names of half-forgotten heroes. But it led him to the temple itself, a unique castle struck out of priceless beryl. Within sat the goddess Fame herself, surrounded by throngs of the living and attended by the muses. The poet is bewitched by the thrilling scenes he witnesses. But watching the crowd which presses upon the goddess for their reward, he can discover no method and no justice in her answers. She is as freakish as her sister Fortune. And when some one asks him whether Fame is his errand, he answers No. His real desire is not immortal memory, but knowledge of living men. And so he is escorted to the House of Rumour, a large hall sixty miles long, so crowded that there is scarce room for another occupant. Here are found the talkers and news-mongers of the world. The house is a babel of news jangled to and fro, and growing as it passes from one to another into a thunderous volume of sound, so loud that Fame at last hears it and decides its fate.

The poem closes when the poet at last

> saw a man
> Which that I ne wot, ne kan,
> But he semedė for to be
> A man of greet auctoritė.

This is King Richard II, and the poem ends here abruptly. There is obviously no natural conclusion at this point ; it is possible that Chaucer was not able to satisfy himself with a

proper ending, and it may be said that he has done all he set out to do. That is, he explains that the object of his nightly vigils is not Fame merely, but proceeds from a deep interest in the doings of his fellow men ; these he will record, and the rumour of his work may or may not be approved by Fame. It is all a matter of caprice. But it is also a matter of indifference to him. Whatever may be the result, he will study mankind—he will write the "Canterbury Tales." It is difficult to see what he could have added to his poem, if he had no ulterior design in his mind. And if the poem was written as an appeal to the King, it could not have been closed more suitably ; and if again it was written about 1384, or a little earlier, the reward came in the King's permission to Chaucer to employ a deputy at the Customs in 1385.

Taking the poem as it is left to us, however, it is assuredly one of the most pleasing allegorical poems of the time. Its easy octosyllabics trip with the light tone, but do not allow it to become flippant. The serious purpose is manifest ; the poet will rise above the petty meannesses which produce discord in human nature, and with the aid of humour as well as philosophy will see into the hearts of men. But he will not take himself *too* seriously ; he makes no appeal at the temple of fame. He is modest, feeling perhaps that Dante, Virgil, Ovid, and the rest have contributed a large share to his offerings. So it is ; but after all, the poem is in English verses, which Chaucer

wrote—not Dante, nor another. Their ease, the dainty touches which enliven them, the graceful cadences, are his alone ; and even when the thoughts and images are borrowed, they are given an individual turn which makes them as good as original. We may detract much from its merits on these various considerations, but the "Hous of Fame" will remain a delight to all who can read it with an ear for poetry.

The "Hous of Fame" was probably completed about the middle of 1384. Its author had declared himself unmistakably in favour of his present interests and his immediate pleasure ; the dream of posthumous renown did not seduce him. It is likely that the appeal for more leisure made in this poem was answered by the King—possibly through the intervention of the Queen—in the favour that relieved Chaucer from his servitude at the Customs in 1385. Having procured him this boon the Queen proceeded to set the poet a commission which would fill his newly won leisure in a worthy manner. He had written much in deference to John of Gaunt, much which suggested that his view of woman was mean and cynical. The "Romaunt of the Rose" was bad enough, but Cressida was worse. Could he do nothing in a loftier vein ? Could he not remove the stain from the sex, and portray women in their nobler guise ? The "Boke of the Duchesse" and the "Parlement of Foules" did something, and were counted to him for righteousness ; but, after all, these were but compliments

to particular persons, and did not remove the bad impression of the Rose and of Cressida. In order to do this, he undertook the " Legende of Good Women " ; a poem which must have given pleasure to his royal patron, and which, though unfinished, fulfilled the desired purpose.

The " Legende " is introduced by a delightful prologue in which the poet deals with the reproaches against his character in allegorical fashion and with an exquisite grace, that makes this one of his most charming passages. It is his last use of the dream-allegory. Sleeping in a lovely meadow starred with the flowers of May, he perceives in his dream Amor, the god of Love, approaching from the distance. He leads by the hand the beautiful queen, Alcestis, robed in the hues of the daisy, which was doubtless Queen Anne's favourite flower. A royal group of nineteen ladies attends her, and innumerable women follow. When all are seated in the meadow, Amor sees the poet and upbraids him roundly with his mishandling of the female sex. The Queen defends him, and on his behalf promises that atonement shall be made. She then commands him to write the stories that compose the " Legende " and bring them to her " at Eltham or at Sheen." Thus Alcestis is identified with Queen Anne, and the influence of the Queen over the King is daintily hinted at. The whole prologue is in Chaucer's most serious vein, admirable alike in feeling and in execution.

Twenty stories were to be told, culminating

in the crowning episode of Alcestis, the type and flower of perfect womanhood. But the poet only reached the ninth, and the work remains another stately fragment. External circumstances perhaps had something to do with this suspension of the tales ; or possibly Chaucer was already involved in the more congenial interests of the "Canterbury Tales." For the stories of the "Legende" are necessarily written in a sustained mood of seriousness, indeed of tragedy ; they give no scope to the humour and gaiety which our liveliest poet must have found it difficult to suppress ; there is not enough variety about the stories to give the poet that freedom of fancy which was his native air ; and the narrow limits within which each story had to be told hampered him still further. Hence his task became wearisome at the end, and the last tales are so perfunctory as almost to be uninteresting.

While Chaucer may have drawn the idea of his stories from Boccaccio's "De Mulieribus Claris" in Latin prose, it is clear that he was mainly indebted to the original Latin poets for his chief inspiration and matter. The "Legende" in fact shows us our poet almost free of Italian influences of any kind. He had always been fond of Ovid, and his study of Virgil was clearly responsible for the best part of the first book of the "Hous of Fame." Of the nine stories he completed, that of Dido came from Virgil, and that of Hypsipyle and Medea from the Trojan History of Guido de Colonna,

a Latin writer of the thirteenth century. The other tales came from Ovid's "Heroides," "Metamorphoses," or "Fasti," with no more than hints from Boccaccio and other sources. Like Chaucer, Ovid knew every mood of love, tragic or worldly; but Chaucer did not treat the mythological themes with quite the Roman's solemnity; he turns Theseus, Æneas, and the rest into erring lovers of an everyday English type, and he endows Ariadne, Thisbe, and Dido with deep human charm.

The nine completed stories are those of Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle and Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra. The early ones are told most fully; but none are without some measure of interest. As a fair example of Chaucer's skill in this type of story, we give the legend of Thisbe of Babylon complete.

Incipit Legende Tesba Babilon, Martiris

At Babiloyne whilom fil it thus,—
The whichė toun the queene Semyramus [1]
Leet dichen al about, and wallės make
Ful hye, of hardė tilės wel y-bake:
There werė dwellynge in this noble toune
Two lordės, which that were of grete renoune,
And wonėden so neigh upon a grene,
That ther nas but a stoon wal hem betwene,
As ofte in grettė tounės is the wone.
And sooth to seyn, that o man had a sone,

[1] *Semyramus*, or Semiramis, mythical queen of Nineveh, and founder of Babylon, a woman of great personal power and beauty. Her husband was Ninus, whom she survived forty years.

Of al that londe oon of the lustieste ;
That other had a doghtre, the faireste
That esteward in the worlde was tho dwellynge.
The name of everyche gan to other sprynge,
By wommen that were neyghèbores aboute ;
For in that contre yit, withouten doute,
Máydens ben y-kept for jelousye
Ful streytė, leste they diden somme folye.
This yongė man was clepėd Piramus,
And Tesbe highte the maide,—Naso [1] seith thus.
And thus by réporte was hir name y-shove,
That as they wex in agė, wex hir love.
And certeyn, as by reson of hir age,
Ther myghte have ben betwex hem marïage,
But that hir fadres nold it not assente,
And both in love y-likė soore they brente,
That noon of al hir frendės myghte it lette.
But prevely somtymė yit they mette
By sleight, and spoken somme of hir desire,
As wre the glede and hotter is the fire ;
Forbeede a love, and it is ten so woode.
This wal, which that bitwixe hem bothė stoode,
Was cloven a-two, right fro the toppe adoun,
Of oldė tyme, of his foundacioun.
But yit this clyftė was so narwe and lite
It was nat seenė, deere ynogh a myte ;
But what is that that love kannat espye ?
Ye lovers two, if that I shal nat lye,
Ye founden first this litel narwė clifte,
And with a soune as softe as any shryfte,
They leete hir wordės thurgh the cliftė pace,
And tolden, while they stoden in the place,
Al hire compleynt of love, and al hire wo.
At every tymė whan they dorstė so

[1] *Naso, i.e.* Ovid, the Latin poet [43 B.C.–A.D. 18].

Upon the o syde of the walle stood he,
And on that other sydė stood Tesbe,
The swootė soun of other to receyve.
And thus here wardeyns woldė they disceyve,
And every day this walle they woldė threete,
And wisshe to God that it were doun y-bete,
Thus wolde they seyn : "Allas, thou wikked walle !
Thurgh thyn envýė thow us lettest alle !
Why nyltow cleve, or fallen al a-two ?
Or at the leestė, but thow wouldest so,
Yit woldestow but onės let us meete,
Or onės that we myghtė kyssen sweete,
Than were we covered of oure carės colde.
But nathėles, yit be we to thee holde,
In as muche as thou suffrest for to goon
Our wordės thurgh thy lyme and eke thy stoon ;
Yet oghtė we with the ben wel apayede."
And whan these idel wordės weren sayde,
The coldė walle they wolden kysse of stoon,
And take hir leve, and forth they wolden goon.
And this was gladly in the evėtyde,
Or wonder erly, lest men it espyede.
And longė tyme they wroght in this manere,
Til on a day, whan Phebus gan to clere—
Aurora with the stremės of hire hete
Had driėd uppe the dewe of herbės wete—
Unto this clyfte, as it was wont to be,
Come Piramus, and after come Tesbe.
And plighten trouthė fully in here faye,
That ilkė samė nyght to steele awaye,
And to begile hire wardeyns everychone,
And forth out of the citee for to gone.
And, for the feeldės ben so broode and wide,
Fór to meete in o place at o tyde
They settė markes, hire metyng sholdė bee

Ther kyng Nynus was graven, under a tree,—
For oldė payens, that ydóles heriede,
Useden tho in feeldės to ben beriede,—
And fastė by his gravė was a welle.
And, shortly of this talė for to telle,
This covenaunt was affermėd wonder faste,
And longe hem thoghtė that the sonnė laste,
That it nere goon under the see adoun.
This Tesbe hath so greete affeccioun,
And so grete lykynge Piramus to see,
That whan she seigh hire tymė myghtė bee,
At nyght she stale awey ful prevėly,
With hire face y-wympled subtilly.
For al hire frendės, for to save hire trouthe,
She hath forsake ; allas, and that is routhe,
That ever woman woldė be so trewe
To trusten man, but she the bet hym knewe :
And to the tree she goth a ful goode paas,
For love made hir so hardy in this caas ;
And by the welle adoun she gan hir dresse.
Allas ! than comith a wildė leonesse
Out of the woode, withouten more arreste,
With blody mouth, of strangelynge of a beste,
To drynken of the welle ther as she sat.
And whan that Tesbe had espyėd that,
She ryst hir up, with a ful drery herte,
And in a cave with dredful foot she sterte,
For by the moone she saugh it wel withalle.
And as she ranne, hir wympel leet she falle,
And tooke noon hede, so sore she was awhaped,
And eke so gladė that she was escaped ;
And ther she sytte, and darketh wonder stille.
Whan that this lyonesse hath dronke hire fille,
Aboute the wellė gan she for to wynde,
And ryght anon the wympil gan she fynde,

And with hir blody mouth it al to-rente.
Whan this was don, no lenger she ne stente,
But to the woode hir wey than hath she nome.
And at the laste this Piramus is come,
But al to longe, allas, at home was hee !
The moonė shone, men myghtė wel y-see,
And in his wey, as that he come ful faste,
Hise eyen to the grounde adoun he caste ;
And in the sonde as he behelde adoun,
He seigh the steppės broode of a lyoun ;
And in his herte he sodeynly agroos,
And pale he wex, therwith his heer aroos,
And nere he come, and founde the wympel torne.
" Allas," quod he, " the day that I was borne !
This o nyght wol us lovers bothė slee !
How shulde I axen mercy of Tesbee,
Whan I am he that have yow slayne, allas ?
My byddyng hath i-slayn yow in this caas !
Allas, to bidde a woman goon by nyghte
In placė ther as peril fallen myghte !
And I so slowe ! allas, I ne haddė be
Here in this place, a furlong wey or ye !
Now what lyon that be in this foreste,
My body mote he renten, or what beste
That wilde is, gnawen mote he now my herte ! "
And with that worde he to the wympel sterte,
And kiste it ofte, and wepte on it ful sore ;
And seydė, " Wympel, allas ! ther nys no more,
But thou shalt feele as wel the blode of me,
As thou hast felt the bledynge of Tesbe."
And with that worde he smot hym to the herte ;
The blood out of the wounde as brodė sterte
As water, whan the conduyte broken is.
Now Tesbe, which that wystė nat of this,
But syttyng in hire drede, she thoghtė thus :

" If it so fallė that my Piramus
Be comen hider, and may me nat y-fynde,
He may me holden fals, and eke unkynde."
And oute she comith, and after hym gan espien
Bóthė with hire herte and with hire eyen ;
And thoghte, " I wol him tellen of my drede,
Bothe of the lyonesse and al my dede."
And at the laste hire love than hath she founde,
Bétynge with his helis on the grounde,
Al blody ; and therwithal abak she sterte,
And lyke the wawės quappė gan hir herte,
And pale as boxe she wax, and in a throwe
Avisėd hir, and gan him wel to knowe,
That it was Piramus, hire hertė dere.
Who koudė writė which a dedely chere
Hath Tesbe now ? and how hire heere she rente ?
And how she gan hir-selvė to turmente ?
And how she lyth and swowneth on the grounde ?
And how she wepe of terės ful his wounde ?
How medleth she his blood with hir compleynte ?
How with his blood hir-selven gan she peynte ?
How clippeth she the dedė corps ? allas !
How doth this woful Tesbe in this cas ?
How kysseth she his frosty mouthe so colde ?
" Who hath don this ? and who hath ben so bolde
To sleen my leefe ? O spekė, Piramus !
I am thy Tesbe, that thee calleth thus ! "
And therwithal she lyfteth up his heed.
This woful man, that was nat fully deed,
Whan that he herde the name of Tesbe crien,
On hire he caste his hevy dedely eyen,
And doun agayn, and yeldeth up the goste.
Tesbe rist uppe, withouten noyse or boste,
And saugh hir wympel and his empty shethe,
And eke his swerde, that him hath don to dethe.
Than spake she thus : " Thy woful hande," quod she,

" Is strong ynogh in swiche a werke to me ;
For love shal me yive strengthe and hardynesse,
To make my woundė large ynogh, I gesse.
I wole the folowen ded, and I wol be
Felawe and cause eke of thy deeth," quod she.
" And thogh that nothing save the deth only
Myghte the fro me departė trewėly,
Thou shal no more departė now fro me
Than fro the deth, for I wol go with the.
" And now, ye wrecched jelouse fadrės oure,
Wé, that weren whilome children youre,
We prayen yow, withouten more envye,
That in o grave i-fere we moten lye,
Syn love hath broght us to this pitouse ende.
And ryghtwis God to every lover sende,
That loveth trewely, more prosperite
Than ever haddė Piramus and Tesbe.
And let no gentile woman hire assure,
To putten hire in swiche an áventure.
But God forbedė but a woman kan
Ben also trewe and lovynge as a man,
And for my parte I shal anon it kythe."
And with that worde his swerde she took as swithe,
That warme was of hire lovės blood, and hote,
And to the hertė she hire-selven smote.
And thus are Tesbe and Piramus ago.
Of trewė men I fyndė but fewe mo
In al my bookės, save this Piramus,
And therfore have I spoken of hym thus
For it is deyntee to us men to fynde
A man that kan in love be trewe and kynde.
Here may ye seen, what lover so he be,
A woman dar and kan as wel as he.[1]

[1] The reader will not need to be reminded of the lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe in the " Midsummer Night's Dream."

V

WE now come to a consideration of the masterpiece by which Chaucer is best known, the wonderful collection of narrative verse known as the "Canterbury Tales." When the pilgrimage which is celebrated in those poems was made cannot be asserted with certainty. The most probable year is 1387 : it may have been 1385. Some of the tales that were told on the journey were certainly written much earlier ; but we cannot be far wrong in supposing that during the years 1385–1388, immediately following the "Legende of Good Women," the plan of the "Canterbury Tales" gradually took shape in the poet's mind.

These years provided Chaucer with his first really sharp taste of the harshness and uncertainty of Fortune, about which he had so often moralized. Early in 1386 John of Gaunt left England in order to push his claims to the throne of Castille ; and later in the same year Chaucer was chosen M.P., sitting at Westminster as one of the "knights of the shire" for the county of Kent.

Gaunt's journey was undertaken, in all likelihood, because he saw his influence waning in England ; certainly the Parliament of 1386 was devoted to the interests of his brother Gloucester, and forced many unwelcome concessions from the King, among which was

the formation of a council of eleven to administer the realm. This council made short work of the King's former ministers and favourites, dismissing some and consigning others to the block. The harassed country, overburdened with taxes, reading everywhere extravagance and failure, hopelessly divided between this aim and that, welcomed Gloucester's sweeping changes. But to Chaucer, who had so signally enjoyed the favour of the previous regime, they brought complete disaster. He lost both his comptrollerships at the end of 1386. Next year his wife seems to have died, and, whatever grief he felt at this blow, the loss of her pension was a serious matter to him. About the same time he had to give up his home at Aldgate. Add to all this his known carelessness in prosperous times, and we can understand why he was compelled, in May 1388, to commute his two pensions, which he assigned for a lump sum to one John Scalby at that date. The pinch of poverty must have been thus pressing him almost (if not exactly) at the very time that he was inditing the brightest and greatest of his poems, namely, the prologue to the "Canterbury Tales."

In 1389, however, the King dismissed Gloucester, and no one seems to have protested; Gaunt returned, and the hopes of Chaucer revived. The King had a spasm of energy and set about governing the country in his own way. For his faithful Chaucer the result was satisfactory: he was appointed clerk of the King's

works at the Tower, Westminster, and other places—an office bearing the welcome salary of two shillings a day, with duties congenial in themselves, and no less congenial because they could be performed by proxy. The duties took Chaucer to various parts of the country, and brought him into contact with all kinds of people. He had the superintendence and engagement of workmen for the royal palaces and demesnes ; he was required to erect scaffolds for tournaments—the erection of a specially large one for the royal party at Smithfield is recorded in 1390 ; he had charge of the gardens, fish-ponds, mills and park enclosures pertaining to the castles and manors under his jurisdiction. In this office his powers were considerable. He could impress workmen at his own pleasure wherever they could be found ; and all the materials needed it was his duty to buy " at the King's prices," even though the sellers murmured. These powers were often put into force, and did not add to the King's popularity. Chaucer enjoyed other commissions too. He was a member of a commission appointed to arrange for the repair of the dykes and drains between Greenwich and Woolwich in this same year 1390, and he supervised the renovation of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, about the same time. During the autumn he was the victim of two highway robberies on the same day, while engaged in his duties near Westminster, and one of the thieves, being vanquished in the trial of battle, was hanged.

This tale of prosperity is, however, short, and comes to an abrupt end. No cause can be given for Chaucer's peremptory dismissal from his offices in the middle of 1391. No change of government occurred to account for it, and we can only fall back on the very probable supposition that Chaucer had not given satisfaction in his conduct of his office. His real interest was now in the "Canterbury Tales"; at the best he was negligent in financial and business matters; and doubtless he left overmuch to his deputies. The salary was valuable, but the leisure too scanty for a poet embedded in the execution of a great design. From 1391 the position was sadly the reverse of this. Leisure was abundant, but finances strained. Chaucer lived almost from hand to mouth during the rest of his life, pitifully dependent upon the crumbs that fell from the tables of occasional patrons who valued his poetry. In spite of poverty and disappointment, however, the cheerful and kindly humanity of his nature remained unsoured, and permeates the last no less than the first of the "Canterbury Tales."

Chaucer had passed through periods in which French, Italian and Latin influences had in turn predominated in the expression of his genius. He now gave a freer rein to the English element in him, and produced a series of tales which are more emphatically a native product than any other of his works. No doubt the general conception of the whole collection was suggested by Boccaccio's "Decamerone"; but Chaucer's

series has a far greater variety than is to be found in the model, and is animated by a far truer organic vitality. Boccaccio's tales are undoubtedly graceful, often witty, and always polished in the movement of their prose ; but they are, after all, told by narrators who reflect only one rank of life—the idle intellectual class, fastidious in manners, and refined in everything except morals. The life they depict is a detached and artificial life, in a city of pleasure and culture and fashion. Chaucer, on the other hand, gives us a microcosm of English society, noisy, assertive, good-humoured, in which the dignified knight rides cheek by jowl with the drunken cook, and the poor clerk of Oxenford rubs shoulders with the handsome squire and the pimple-faced summoner. The only real comparison we can make with Chaucer's group of story-tellers is that of Langland's field full of folk in "Piers Plowman." Langland indeed shows in a rude inartistic form the germs of many of Chaucer's dramatic qualities. He had the same gift of satire, the same contempt of hypocritical friars, the same sense of individuality ; but he lacked the heroic couplet and Chaucer's metrical skill. He had vision, clear, intense, earnest ; but he could not work up the materials that he possessed into a well-proportioned design. Chaucer surpassed Langland in every respect, differed from him in aim and method ; yet the two men —the one a dour Lollard, the other a gay courtier—tilted with the same weapon at the

same abuses. But Chaucer tinged his dramatic and satirical portraits of friars and pardoners with the saving grace of humour—a grace denied to his stern contemporary. Nevertheless, it is not uninteresting to find, amid Chaucer's constant borrowings from continental models, that perhaps the most powerful strain in his genius, the dramatic, is largely the dower of his humble English ancestry.

Action and dramatic vitality are the key-notes of Chaucer's conception. His tale-tellers do not retire and drawl their time away in sequestered gardens. They set out on a pilgrimage which keeps them on the move and throws them very much into one another's society. As they go along, we hear their jokes and their compliments. The background of the tales is keenly English, and really living. Pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury were a common feature of English mediæval life, but by Chaucer's day they had lost much of their solemnity and were taken rather in the spirit of a holiday. They were undertaken by all classes—by the pleasure-loving wife of Bath as well as the devout prioress, by the boorish miller and the grave man of law—something after the manner of a political meeting of our times. Possibly the poor parson was impressed by the saint's relics : it is difficult to suppose that the cook was—or Chaucer himself either. The pilgrimage was a fashion, and the fashion became epidemic about springtime, as Chaucer himself says. After the long dull winter, the

spring journey would be as delightful as the early days of a schoolboy holiday. We can easily picture the amusement by the way. The miller, we are told, took his bagpipe : so there was no lack of music to enliven the journey. The cook also was too drunk to tell his tale on the fourth day ; which suggests a further combination of revelry with piety, when (and even before) the nights fell. The spirit of fun and frivolity was rampant, so much so that the leading clergy from time to time discouraged the pilgrimages altogether. Such a mixed and lively crowd afforded Chaucer the ideal elements for his genius.

Chaucer in a devout determination to make the pilgrimage rested at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, not far from London Bridge, on the 15th of April, and by night as many as twenty-nine persons had come to sleep at the inn, preparatory to starting on the same journey next day. The host is very pleased to see such a jolly company. Why should each of them travel in unsociable solitude ? It would be livelier for them to travel in company, and he himself would act as escort and general master of the ceremonies. This proposal obviously meets with ready acceptance—the readier because the host, Harry Bailey, is himself a jovial, comfortable-looking man, full of fun and good fellowship, impatient at the sight of dismal faces, and a born entertainer. Possibly the host represents a real friend of the poet's who sat with him in parliament, as member for West-

minster. He rallies the moody poet for his habit of looking on the ground and compliments him on his rotund figure ; after Chaucer has half told his tale, the host interrupts him in a tone of familiar contempt which may well reflect a real experience. For Chaucer was not always lively ; he was a spectator of life often, and poet-like was apt to get lost in his own fancies.

It is the host's suggestion that the tedium of the journey should be enlivened by a series of tales, two to be told by each pilgrim on the outward journey, and two on the way home. He himself is to be the judge and to settle which of the pilgrims tells the best tales. The winner is to be entertained to a supper at the Tabard on his return at the expense of his companions. A drink of the host's wine ratifies the proposal, and all retire to rest. Next morning the host was the cock who awakened his guests, and gathering them into a flock rode out at their head along the Old Kent Road. Talk and song enlivened the first two miles, till at the watering of St. Thomas the host reined in his horse and reminded the pilgrims of their promise. With arbitrary good humour he takes the lead, asserting that

> Whoso be rebel to my juggèment
> Shal paye for all that by the wey is spent—

a formidable threat which makes them all ready to " draw cut " for the honour of telling the first tale. The lot falls to the knight, to

everybody's satisfaction ; they all make ready to listen as well as may be to the tale which the worthy knight tells as they jog along.

The design thus sketched, involving as it did the telling of a hundred and twenty tales, was never carried out ; twenty tales only were completed and four others left unfinished ; consequently the work is an impressive, but still incomplete, fragment. Of course this detracts from its value as a whole ; apart from the fact that four good tales are always better than one, there is a natural desire to see the pilgrims back at the Tabard, and to be present at their farewell supper, instead of losing them on the way. The design was too big for a poet of fifty, busy in other respects as he was, and working under difficulties, to hope to carry to its completion. But if this is so—if the poet has not achieved his epic scheme—we must not be blind to the abundance that he has given us. Each tale is complete in itself, and may fairly be judged as an individual poem, which in some cases reaches the very summit of narrative excellence. And the variety of the tales is, as we shall see, astonishing. But it is not more astonishing than the interest that, by his humour and insight, he has given to the personalities of the pilgrims. Not only the prologue, but the links between the successive tales, and the tales themselves, throw into vivid relief a varied series of human characters such as Shakespeare alone in our literature has surpassed. For subtlety of touch and delicacy of

self-revelation, for that life-like wholeness which only the master-dramatist can give to his creations, Chaucer must stand very close to the highest. The "Prologue" is a gallery of portraits, mediæval in costume and habits, but faithful to the eternal in human nature also. As a preliminary to our study of the tales themselves, we proceed therefore to examine this introductory masterpiece.

The catalogue of dramatis personæ might easily have been a monotonous affair in the hands of a less subtle master of dramatic presentation than Chaucer. But by a careful arrangement of his people, by taking full advantage of the principle of contrast, Chaucer has made his enumeration a wonderfully interesting poem. The pilgrims are introduced to us with all their idiosyncrasies of dress and character artfully inventoried; their tastes and fads are not omitted; their very warts and pimples are not forgotten! They live before us, clean-cut at once for the eye and for the imagination. We know them both in themselves and as they appeared to their fellows. The method of reaching this end seems absurdly simple and ingenuous. The poet jots down his points apparently at random, with an economy of words which surprises and delights the critical reader, who is astonished at the vivid reality of the finished portrait. Every sentence tells. From the examples to be presently quoted it will be easy to test the effect of a hundred little phrases, like the dainty touches of the pencil in a con-

summate drawing. The pilgrims could indeed be well painted from Chaucer's descriptions, so exact is the attention to external detail ; but such details are usually of an interpretative kind, throwing some trait of character into prominence, and are usually subsidiary to those little touches of action and behaviour which are even more revealing. Here Chaucer shows himself a master of sympathetic observation, possessed of that searching intuition which probes to the most intimate secrets of human character. A roguish irony is one of his commonest weapons ; satire and serious admiration help ; but good humour is always in his right hand.

The " Prologue " opens with the beautiful exordium quoted on p. 21, which has been broadly and generally admired. It is springtime ; nature is waking into a new round of life ; and folk are eager to set forth on pilgrimages. Among these are the nine-and-twenty at the Tabard whose acquaintance he had made. What and who these pilgrims were he thinks it only " accordaunt to resoun " to tell us. This he proceeds to do, beginning with the knight, as befits that worthy's rank and character.

A Knyght ther was and that a worthy man,
That fro the tymė that he first bigan
To riden out, he lovėd chivalrie,
Trouthe and honóur, fredom and curteisie.
Ful worthy was he in his lordės werre,
And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
As wel in cristendom as in hethėnesse,

And ever honoured for his worthynesse.
At Alisaundre[1] he was whan it was wonne ;
Ful oftė tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
Aboven allė nacions in Pruce.[2]
In Lettow[3] hadde he reysėd and in Ruce,—
No cristen man so ofte of his degree.
In Gernade[4] at the seege eek hadde he be
Of Algezir,[5] and riden in Belmarye.[6]
At Lyeys[7] was he, and at Satalye,[8]
Whan they were wonne ; and in the Gretė See
At many a noble armee hadde he be.
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
And foughten for oure feith at Tramyssene[9]
In lystės thriės, and ay slayn his foo.
This ilkė worthy knyght hadde been also
Somtymė with the lord of Palatye[10]
Agayn another hethen in Turkye ;
And evermoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,
In al his lyf, unto no maner wight.
He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght.
But for to tellen yow of his array,
His hors weren goode, but he ne was nat gay ;
Of fustian he werėd a gypon
Al bismótered with his habergeon,
For he was late y-come from his viage,
And wentė for to doon his pilgrymage.

Here is the perfect knight of chivalry, the combination of Christian gentleman and loyal

[1] Alexandria, taken in 1365 by Pierre de Lusignan.
[2] Prussia.
[3] Lithuania.
[4] Granada.
[5] Algeciras, in Spain.
[6] Doubtful—possibly Palmyra.
[7] In Armenia.
[8] Attalia in Asia Minor, taken from the Turks in 1361.
[9] In Africa.
[10] A small Christian state in Anatolia.

fighter, born of the crusading spirit. With him rode a squire, a yeoman and "servantz namo." The yeoman is a gay figure, in his coat and hood of green ; set up with sword and buckler, spear and baldric ; carrying also a goodly bow and arrows. He had a "nut-head" and a brown face ; wood-craft he knew ; and with his horn slung about his neck, a forester "was he, soothly as I gesse."

The squire was the knight in his youthful guise—a delightful young man, fresh and comely, the courteous lover.

With hym ther was his sone, a yong Squiér,
A lovyere and a lusty bacheler,
With lokkés crulle as they were leyd in presse.
Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.
Of his statúre he was of evene lengthe,
And wonderly delyvere and greet of strengthe ;
And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie,
In Flaundrés, in Artoys and Pycardie,
And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshé flourés whyte and reede ;
Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day ;
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May.
Short was his gowne, with slevés longe and wyde ;
Wel koude he sitte on hors and fairé ryde ;
He koudé songés make and wel endite,
Juste and eek daunce and weel purtreye and write.
So hoote he lovéde that by nyghtertale
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
Curteis he was, lowely and servysáble,
And carf biforn his fader at the table.

As companion figures to those of the knight and his two attendants stand the prioress, her nun and three priests. Only the prioress herself is characterized, the others being merely mentioned ; but the portrait of the dignified lady is one of Chaucer's happiest and most humorous. It throws little sidelights on many social points ; it is a continuous smile, but it leaves the prioress wholly lovable and admirable. Her French may not be perfect ; she is doubtless prim and stately in manner ; but does she not weep when she sees a mouse caught in a trap ?

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy ;
Hire gretteste ooth was but by seintė Loy,[1]
And she was clepėd madame Eglentyne.
Ful weel she soong the servicė dyvyne,
Entunėd in hir nose ful semėly,
And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly
After the scole of Stratford-attė-Bowe,[2]
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
At metė wel y-taught was she with-alle,
She leet no morsel from hir lippės falle,
Ne wette hir fyngrės in hir saucė depe.
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,
Thát no drope ne fille upon hire breste ;
In curteisie was set ful muchel hir leste.
Hire over-lippė wypėd she so clene,
That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
Of grecė, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
Ful semėly after hir mete she raughte,
And sikerly she was of greet desport,

[1] St. Eligius, *i.e.* probably means that she did not swear at all.
[2] She had learned French in England at a nunnery in Stratford near Bow, *i.e.* her French was not Parisian.

And ful plesáunt and amyable of port,
And peynèd hire to countrefetè cheere
Of Court, and been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But for to speken of hire conscïence,
She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous
Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
Of smalè houndès hadde she that she fedde
With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel breed ;
But soorè wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerdè smerte ;
And al was conscïence and tendrè herte.
Ful semyly hir wympul pynchèd was ;
Hire nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal and ther-to softe and reed,
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed ;
It was almoost a spannè brood I trowe,
For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war ;
Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
And ther-on heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
On which ther was first write a crownèd A,
And after *Amor vincit omnia*.[1]

A less worthy representative of the Church follows in the person of the monk, one of those degenerate sons of the monastery who found the rule of St. Benedict over-strict and who combined the pleasures of the field and the table with a minimum of devotion and labour. Yet, as his tale will show, the monk is not an abandoned libertine ; he has his hours of

[1] Love conquers all things.

penance, and tells a long series of very dismal moral stories. His portrait here is most skilfully done. Chaucer seems to have liked him and to have agreed with his genial opinions.

A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that lovėde venerie ;
A manly man, to been an abbot able.
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
And whan he rood men myghte his brydel heere
Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere,
And eek as loude, as dooth the chapel belle,
Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle.
The reule of seint Maure[1] or of seint Beneit,[2]
By-cause that it was old and som-del streit,—
This ilkė Monk leet oldė thyngės pace,
And heeld after the newė world the space.
He yaf nat of that text[3] a pulled hen
That seith that hunters beth nat hooly men,
Ne that a Monk whan he is recchėlees
Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees ;
This is to seyn, a Monk out of his cloystre.
But thilkė text heeld he nat worth an oystre ;
And I seyde his opinioun was good.
What sholde he studie and make hymselven wood,
Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,
Or swynken with his handės and labóure,
As Austyn bit[4] ? how shal the world be served ?
Lat Austyn have his swynk to him reserved.
Therfore he was a prikasour aright ;
Grehoundes he hadde, as swift as fowel in flight :
Of prikyng and of huntyng for the hare

[1] The founder of the Benedictine order in France.
[2] Benedict.
[3] "Just as a fish without water lacks life, so does a monk without a monastery."—From Gratian's "Decretals."
[4] Augustine bids.

Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.
I seigh his sleves y-purfiled at the hond
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond ;
And for to festne his hood under his chyn
He hadde of gold y-wroght a ful curious pyn,
A love knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
His heed was balled that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face as he hadde been enoynt.
He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt ;
Hise eyėn stepe and rollynge in his heed,
That stemėd as a forneys of a leed ;
His bootės souple, his hors in greet estaat.
Now certeinly he was a fair prelaat.
He was nat pale, as a forpynėd goost :
A fat swan loved he best of any roost ;
His palfrey was as broun as is a berye.

This portrait illustrates Chaucer's method admirably. The cumulative effect of a variety of details is excellent ; by a mixture of description, incident, and humour the whole man is brought out. The bald head and shining face play their part in the character-sketch, along with the statement of the monk's opinions ; as usual with Chaucer, these external touches of the brush are acute indices of something more than they state : their effect is nowhere more subtle than here.

Of lower rank and by no means so likable is the friar, who is drawn with a frankly satirical pen. Not that the friar was poorer than the monk. On state occasions he dressed more like a pope than a poor scholar. He knew everybody, and was an agreeable friend to male and female everywhere. For his penance was

easy and his absolutions lightly given wherever a good pittance of silver was forthcoming. Otherwise he could rage like a whelp. To the poor and sick he paid no heed, but he knew the taverns and the jolly fellows in every town. A skilful beggar he was, so fair in his eloquence that if a widow had not a shoe he would squeeze a farthing from her somehow. He lisped his words "to make his English sweet upon his tongue," and when he sang his ribald songs his eyes twinkled like stars on a frosty night. He was in great request on "love-days," and he carried a bundle of knives and pins to give to young wives. Such, we cannot doubt, was the friar as he lived in Chaucer's time, a degenerate disciple of Francis or Dominic, steeped to the soul in sleek hypocrisy. Not Langland nor Wiclif could have preached the friar into a more loathsome and detestable figure.

It is almost a relief to turn to the greedy merchant who chuckles over his gains, but is a worthy man withal.

A Marchant was ther with a forkèd berd,
In mottèleye, and hye on horse he sat ;
Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bevere hat ;
His bootès claspèd faire and fetisly ;
His resons he spak ful solempnèly,
Sownynge alway thencrees of his wynnyng.
He wolde the see were kept for any thing
Bitwixè Middelburgh and Orèwelle.[1]

[1] Middleburgh is on the Dutch coast, almost directly opposite the mouth of the Orwell in Suffolk. It was an important port for the wool trade.

Wel koude he in eschaungé sheeldès selle.
This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette,
Ther wistè no wight that he was in dette,
So estatly was he of his governaunce
With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce.
For sothe he was a worthy man with-alle
But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle.

Sandwiched between the busy merchant and the equally busy lawyer came the poor clerk of Oxenford, type of the needy scholar who had not yet obtained a benefice. Learning was but a lean support we gather from this modest silent man.

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also
That unto logyk haddè longe y-go.
As leenè was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
But lookèd holwe, and ther-to sobrely ;
Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy ;
For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,
Ne was so worldly for to have office :
For hym was levere have at his beddès heed
Twénty bookès clad in blak or reed
Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
Than robès riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie :
But al be that he was a philosophre,
Yet haddè he but litel gold in cofre ;
But al that he myghte of his freendes hente
On bookès and his lernynge he it spente,
And bisily gan for the soulès preye
Of hem that yaf hym wher-with to scoleye.
Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede,
Noght o word spak he mooré than was neede,

And that was seyd in forme and reverence,
And short and quyk and ful of hy senténce.
Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

The "Sergaunt of the Lawe," wary and wise, came next, a man who knew every statute by rote. No one could make a purchase as he could ; no man could write a better deed. His words were always discreet, and at least sounded wise. A very busy man, he always seemed busier than he was, and wore a plain "medley coat." Along with him was a jolly franklin or country-gentleman.

A Frankéleyn was in his compaignye.
Whit was his berd as is a dayésye,
Of his complexioun he was sangwyn.
Wel loved he by the morwe a sope in wyn ;
To lyven in delit was ever his wone,
For he was Epicurus owenė sone,
That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit
Was varraily felicitee parfit.
An housholdere, and that a greet, was he :
Seint Julian was he in his contree ; [1]
His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon ;
A better envynėd man was nowher noon.
Withoutė bakė mete was never his hous,
Of fissh and flessh, and that so plenteuous
It snewėd in his hous of mete and drynke.
Of allė deyntees that men koudė thynke
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
So chaungėd he his mete and his soper.
Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe

[1] *I.e.* entertained his friends well, like St. Julian.

And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.
Wo was his cook but if his saucė were
Poynaunt and sharpe and redy al his geere.
His table dormant in his halle alway,
Stood redy covered al the longė day.
At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire ;
Ful oftė tymė he was knyght of the shire.
An anlaas, and a gipser al of silk,
Heeng at his girdel, whit as mornė milk ;
A shirreve hadde he been, and a countour.
Was nowher such a worthy vavasour.

A group of prosperous citizens follow, by way of contrast to this son of Epicurus. They are on a fair way to become aldermen in the city ; haberdasher, carpenter, weaver, dyer, upholsterer, dress in one livery, and have their knives and pouches mounted in silver. Their wives aspire to the dignity of " Madame " and would not refuse to have their mantles borne for them at festivals. From these, it is a step downward to the cook, who could make blancmange with the best and knew well the taste of London ales, but unfortunately had a tumour on his shin. The shipman, too, is something of a rascal. Though he was " a good felawe " and knew his navigation well, he had removed many a cask of Bordeaux wine, while their chapmen were asleep.

Of nycė conscience took he no keepe.

The doctor of physic is no less a mixture of good and bad humours. He did not study his Bible much, but he knew intimately the masters

of medicine. In surgery and astrology there was none like him ; he went to the root of his patients' maladies, and understood all the humours, whether hot or cold, moist or dry. But he did not overlook his fees,—" for gold in physik is a cordial " ; he made money out of the plague, and was careful in the spending of it ; hence he lived on a spare but nutritious diet. He worked with his apothecary for their mutual benefit. Only his dress was showy :

> In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
> Lynėd with taffata and with sendal.

All these characters are drawn with fine and sure outline, convincing us of exact observation. The exquisite humour of the next figure, the immortal wife of Bath, makes it necessary for Chaucer himself to speak in her case.

> A good wif was ther of bisidė Bathe,
> But she was som-del deef, and that was scathe.
> Of clooth-makyng she haddė swich an haunt
> She passėd hem of Yprės and of Gaunt.
> In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
> That to the offrynge bifore hire sholdė goon ;
> And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
> That she was out of allė charitee.
> Hir coverchiefs ful fynė weren of ground,—
> I dorstė swere they weyėden ten pound,—
> That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.
> Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
> Ful streite y-teyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe ;
> Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
> She was a worthy womman al hir lyve.
> Housbondes at chirchė dore she haddė fyve

Withouten oother compaignye in youthe,—
But ther-of nedeth nat to speke as nowthe,—
And thriés hadde she been at Jerusálem ;
She haddė passėd many a straungė strem ;
At Rome she haddė been, and at Boloigne,
In Galice at Seint Jame,[1] and at Coloigne,
She koudė muchel of wandrynge by the weye.
Gat-tothėd was she, soothly for to seye.
Upon an amblere esily she sat,
Y-wymplėd wel, and on hir heed an hat
As brood as is a bokeler or a targe ;
A foot mantel aboute hir hipės large,
And on hire feet a paire of sporės sharpe.
In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe ;
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she koude of that art the oldė daunce.

Two of the most genuine pilgrims are the following pair, and both show clearly the influence of the reforming spirit in the Church and on Chaucer's mind. The poor town parson is the model clergyman, satisfied to do his parish duties without going up to St. Paul's in search of advancement. He was kind and considerate to every one ; though his flock was scattered wide, he never neglected the humblest if they were sick. He was a shepherd, not a mercenary. Consequently he did not curse for his tithes, but bore patiently with his scanty income. He was no respecter of persons, and snubbed high and low alike. Most of all, he lived as he preached :

Cristės lore, and his Apostles twelve,
He taughte, but first he folwed it hym selve.

[1] *I.e.* at the shrine of St. James de Compostella in Spanish Galicia.

The brother of the good and venerable parson was a plowman, equally noteworthy for his genuine religion.

With hym ther was a Plowman, was his brother,
That hadde y-lad of dong ful many a fother,—
A trewė swynkere and a good was he,
Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee.
God loved he best, with al his hoolė herte,
At allė tymės, thogh him gamed or smerte,
And thanne his neighębore right as hymselve.
He woldė thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
For Cristės sake, for every pourė wight,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
His tithės paydė he ful faire and wel,
Bothe of his proprė swynk and his catel.
In a tabard he rood upon a mere.

We descend in the final group to lower types. There was a reeve, "a slender choleric man," upon whose long legs no calf was to be seen. As a steward of his lord's estates, no man could have been more exact; he kept his accounts well, and knew the yield of every field to a grain. He was a match for the craftiest tenant, and exacted the utmost farthing from all around him. As a result he feathered his own nest comfortably and kept on the right side of his lord by pleasing words. But seen as Chaucer saw him he is a repulsive person, prosperous and pitiless. Two sentences reveal his mean suspicious nature;

Tukkėd he was as is a frere, aboute,
And ever he rood the hyndreste of oure route.

The "gentil Maunciple," buyer of victuals to three hundred lawyers, prospered also in his shrewd dealings with his masters. Clever were these men, but he could beat them all. Even more disagreeable was the summoner, an official in the ecclesiastical courts. His character was as odious as his personal appearance. No drug could cleanse the pimples from his cheeks, nor cool the wine-fire in his blood. He loved onions and strong wine ; and when he was drunk he would speak no word but Latin, of which he had picked up a few tags. The young people of the diocese were in his charge, to yield their secrets and to receive his counsel ; a sad plight for them, because he could pluck a jay as well as the worst.

The hard-pated miller is a little better than these :

The Millere was a stout carl for the nones,
Ful byg he was of brawn and eek of bones ;
That provėd wel, for over-al, ther he cam,
At wrastlynge he wolde have awey the ram.
He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikkė knarre,
Ther nas no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
His berd, as any sowe or fox, was reed,
And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cope right of his nose he hade
A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys,
Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys ;
His nosėthirlės blakė were and wyde ;
A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde ;
His mouth as wyde was as a greet forneys,

He was a janglere and a goliardeys,[1]
And that was moost of synne and harlotriës.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thriës,[2]
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold,[3] pardee.
A whit cote and a blew hood werèd he.
A baggèpipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.

Along with the summoner went a pardoner, lately arrived from Rome, singing like a trumpet his favourite song, "Come hither, love, to me." He had a rich mass of yellow locks, upon which he wore no hood; large glaring eyes, and no beard, he had; and he nursed a wallet, full of pardons, all hot from Rome. Among his relics were a piece of our Lady's veil, a patch of the sail of Peter's boat, a leather cross, and some pig's bones with which he got from poor persons two months' earnings in a day. But he was an excellent ecclesiastic in church. No one surpassed him in telling a story, but his especial forte was to sing an offertory; and after that was sung, he loosed his tongue to win silver, and very much he gained with his tuneful voice.

The pardoner is the last of the pilgrims; but a few lines must be spared for mine host of the Tabard.

A semely man Oure Hoostè was with-alle
For to han been a marchal in an halle.

[1] Ribald.
[2] "Tell thrice," *i.e.* take his payment three times.
[3] Referring to the old proverb, "An honest miller has a thumb of gold." Millers used to test their samples with the thumb.

A largė man he was, with eyen stepe,
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe ;
Boold of his speche, and wys and well y-taught
And of manhod hym lakkedė right naught.
Eek therto he was right a myrie man,
And after soper pleyen he bigan,
And spak of myrthe amongės othere thynges,
Whan that we haddė maad our rekenynges ;
And seydė thus : " Now, lordynges, trewėly,
Ye been to me right welcome, hertėly ;
For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
I ne saugh this yeer so myrie a compaignye
At onės in this herberwe as is now ;
Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthė, wiste I how.
And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,
To doon yow ese, and it shal costė noght.
" Ye goon to Canterbury—God yow speede,
The blisful martir quitė yow youre meede !
And, wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye ;
For trewėly confort ne myrthe is noon
To ridė by the weye doumb as a stoon ;
And therfore wol I maken yow disport,
As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
And if you liketh alle, by oon assent,
Now for to stonden at my juggėment,
And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
To-morwė, whan ye riden by the weye,
Now, by my fader soulė, that is deed,
But ye be myrie, smyteth of myn heed !
Hoold up youre hond, withouten moorė speche."
Oure conseil was nat longė for to seche ;
Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
And graunted hym withouten moore avys,
And bad him seye his verdit, as hym leste.

The host then propounds his scheme, as we have previously explained it, and the "Prologue" closes with the drawing lots for the honour of telling the first tale.

VI

THE knight's tale, which opens the series of tales, is the *pièce de resistance* among them. It is one of the ripe fruits of Chaucer's study of Boccaccio. The Italian poet's ponderous epic of Theseus, the "Teseide," had been, at least in part, closely translated by Chaucer as early as 1380; but the "Knightes Tale" is a complete retelling of the story, in a condensed and far more poetical form. In this mature piece Chaucer rises to his zenith in dignified and stately poetry and in his masterly handling of the heroic couplet which he had perfected. In its vivid pictorial power, in its rich colouring, in its romantic tone, in its subtle sympathy, it surpasses Boccaccio as much as it also surpasses anything else of the same kind in mediæval literature. It is an anachronism, doubtless, to bring two Theban gentlemen from ancient Greece to a mediæval tournament; and there are many other anachronisms besides. But these are mere dust in the balance, when eternal truth is being revealed. "Everywhere," says Ten Brink, "there is seen a great delicacy of meaning, a conscious art which is only fully revealed by continual study;

for it delights to hide itself under a certain gaiety of tone, and a simple though always vivid and significant diction." The tale more than deserves this high praise.

The story is that of the two Theban nobles, Palamon and Arcite, who were taken prisoner by Theseus of Athens, and lodged in a strong tower. Languishing there, they one day catch a glimpse of Emilia, the king's sister-in-law, and their violent love for her sunders their life-long friendship. After a time Arcite is set free, and Palamon escapes. By a strange chance they meet in a wood near Athens, and prepare for a mortal combat. Theseus, however, unexpectedly intervenes, hears their story, and proposes that a great tournament shall be held, in which each of them shall bring fifty champions to contend for Emilia's hand. In the fight which follows, Palamon is beaten ; Arcite is betrothed to Emilia ; but in his hour of triumph he is struck down by one of Palamon's supporters. Dying, he hands over Emilia to Palamon, and these two are wed with all due pomp and circumstance. Such, in brief outline, is the touching story which, to their credit be it said, pleased both host and pilgrims alike.

The tale itself is of genuine interest, suitably adorned with all the glitter and ideals of chivalry. But this ornament is not the whole, important and appealing though it be. The characterization is excellent, indeed very fine, and quite modern in its psychological subtlety. The rather melancholy Palamon, paying his

addresses to Venus, is an effective contrast with Arcite, the devotee of Mars, headstrong, passionate, but generous. Our sympathies are so genuinely moved that we are rather indignant with the poetic irony which awards Emilia at the end to the less lovable Palamon. Emilia herself, again, is not the usual pretty doll of chivalry, but has a beautiful personality in keeping with her external charms ; and Theseus is royal, every inch of him. Not in "The Two Noble Kinsmen," a fine play ascribed to Shakespeare and Fletcher, is the dramatic force of these four characters so well and surely developed in action and speech. The characters, like the setting of the tale, are an exquisite reflection of the sunset of mediæval chivalry.

A liberal quotation from this splendid poem must be given. We choose the passage in which the poet expends all his descriptive skill upon the lists in which the great tournament is to be held.

I trowe men woldė deme it necligence
If I forgete to tellen the dispence
Of Thesëus, that gooth so bisily
To maken up the lystės roially,
That swich a noble theatre as it was
I dar wel seyn that in this world there nas.
The circuīt a mylė was aboute,
Wallėd of stoon and dychėd al withoute.
Round was the shape, in manere of compaas,
Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,
That whan a man was set on o degree,
He lettė nat his felawe for to see.

Estward ther stood a gate of marbul whit,
Westward right swich another in the opposit.
And, shortly to concluden, swich a place
Was noon in erthe, as in so litel space ;
For in the lond ther was no crafty man
That geométrie or ars-metrik kan,
Ne portreitour, ne kervere of ymáges,
That Thesëus ne yaf him mete and wages,
The theatre for to maken and devyse.
And, for to doon his ryte and sacrifise,
He estward hath, upon the gate above,
In worshipe of Venús, goddesse of love,
Doon make an auter and an oratórie ;
And westward, in the mynde and in memórie
Of Mars, he makéd hath right swich another,
That costè largèly of gold a fother.
And northward, in a touret on the wal,
Of alabastre whit and reed coral,
An oratorie richè for to see,
In worshipe of Dyane of chastitee
Hath Thesëus doon wroght in noble wyse.
But yet hadde I forgeten to devyse
The noble kervyng and the portreitures,
The shape, the contenaunce, and the figures
That weren in thise oratories thre.
First, in the temple of Venus maystow se,
Wroght on the wal, ful pitous to biholde,
The broken slepès, and the sikès colde,
The sacred teeris, and the waymentynge,
The firy strokès, and the desirynge,
That lovès servauntz in this lyf enduren ;
The othès that her covenantz assuren ;
Plesaunce and Hope, Desir, Foolhardynesse,
Beautee and Youthè, Bauderie, Richesse,
Charmès and Force, Lesyngès, Flaterye,

Despensė, Bisynesse and Jalousye,
That wered of yelewe goldės a gerland
And a cokkow sitynge on hir hand ;
Féstes, instrumentz, carólės, daunces,
Lust and array, and alle the circumstaunces
Of love, whiche that I reken, and rekne shal,
By ordre weren peynted on the wal,
And mo than I kan make of mencioun ;
For soothly al the mount of Citheroun,[1]
Ther Venus hath hir principal dwellynge,
Was shewėd on the wal in portreyynge,
With al the gardyn and the lustynesse.
Nat was forgeten the porter Ydelnesse,
Ne Narcisus the faire of yore agon,
Ne yet the folye of kyng Salamon,
Ne yet the gretė strengthe of Ercules,
Thenchauntementz of Medea and Circes,
Ne of Turnus, with the hardy fiers corage,
The richė Cresus, kaytyf in servage.
Thus may ye seen that Wysdom ne Richėsse,
Beautee ne Sleightė, Strengthė, Hardynesse,
Ne may with Venus holdė champartie,
For as hir list the world than may she gye.
Lo, alle thise folk so caught were in hir las
Til they for wo ful oftė seyde, " Allas ! "
Suffiseth heere ensamples oon or two,
And though I koudė rekene a thousand mo.
The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
Was naked, fletynge in the largė see,
And fro the navele doun al covered was
With wawės grene, and brighte as any glas.
A citole in hir right hand haddė she,
And on hir heed, ful semely for to se,
A rosė gerland, fressh and wel smellynge,

[1] Cythera in Cyprus was sacred to Venus, not Citheron, which was sacred to the Muses.

Above hir heed hir dowvès flikerynge.
Biforn hire stood hir sonè Cupido,
Upon his shuldrès wyngès hadde he two,
And blind he was, as it is often seene ;
A bowe he bar and arwès brighte and kene.
Why sholde I noght as wel eek telle yow al
The portreiture that was upon the wal
Withinne the temple of myghty Mars the rede ?
Al peynted was the wal, in lengthe and brede,
Lyk to the estrès of the grisly place
That highte the gretè temple of Mars in Trace,[1]
In thilkè coldè, frosty regioun
Ther as Mars hath his sovereyn mansioun.
First, on the wal was peynted a forest,
In which ther dwelleth neither man nor best,
With knotty, knarry, bareyne treès olde
Of stubbès sharpe and hidouse to biholde,
In which ther ran a rumbel and a swough,
As though a storm sholde bresten every bough ;
And dounward from an hille, under a bente,
Ther stood the temple of Mars army-potente,
Wroght al of burnèd steel, of which the entree
Was long and streit, and gastly for to see ;
And ther out came a rage, and such a veze
That it made all the gatès for to rese.
The northren lyght in at the dorès shoon,—
For wyndowe on the wal ne was ther noon
Thurgh which men myghten any light discerne,—
The dores were al of adamant eterne,
Y-clenchèd overthwart and endèlong
With iren tough, and for to make it strong,
Every pylér, the temple to sustene,
Was tonnè greet, of iren bright and shene.
Ther saugh I first the derke ymaginyng

[1] A wild region corresponding to modern Turkey.

Of felonye, and al the compassyng ;
The crueel ire, reed as any gleede ;
The pykėpurs, and eke the palė drede ;
The smylere, with the knyfe under the cloke ;
The shepnė, brennynge with the blakė smoke ;
The tresoun of the mordrynge in the bedde ;
The open werre, with woundės al bibledde ;
Contek, with blody knyf, and sharpe manace ;
Al ful of chirkyng was that sory place.
The sleere of hymself yet saugh I ther,
His hertė blood hath bathėd al his heer ;
The nayl y-dryven in the shode a-nyght ;
The coldė deeth, with mouth gapyng upright.
Amyddės of the temple sat Meschaunce,
With disconfort and sory contenaunce.
Yet saugh I Woodnesse, laughynge in his rage,
Armėd compleint, out-hees, and fiers outrage,
The careyne, in the busk, with throte y-corve,
A thousand slayn and nat of qualm y-storve ;
The tiraunt, with the pray by force y-raft ;
The toun destroyėd, ther was no thyng laft.
Yet saugh I brent the shippes hoppestères ;
The huntė strangled with the wildė beres ;
The sowė freten the child right in the cradel ;
The cook y-scalded, for al his longė ladel.
Noght was forgeten by the infortune of Marte,
The cartere over-ryden with his carte ;
Under the wheel ful lowe he lay adoun.
Ther were also of Martes divisioun,
The barbour and the bocher, and the smyth
That forgeth sharpė swerdės on his styth ;
And al above, depeynted in a tour,
Saugh I Conquést sittynge in greet honour
With the sharpė swerd over his heed
Hángyngė by a soutil twynės threed.

Depeynted was the slaughtre of Julius,
Of grete Nero, and of Antonius,—
Al be that thilkė tyme they were unborn,
Yet was hir deth depeynted ther-biforn
By manasynge of Mars, right by figure,
So it was shewėd in that portreiture
As is depeynted in the sterres above
Who shal be slayn or ellės deed for love ;
Suffiseth oon ensample in stories olde,
I may nat rekene hem allė though I wolde.
The statue of Mars upon a cartė stood,
Armėd, and lookėd grym as he were wood,
And over his heed ther shynen two figures
Of sterrės that been clepėd in scriptures,
That oon Puella, that oother Rubëus.[1]
This god of armės was arrayėd thus :
A wolf ther stood biforn hym at his feet
With eyen rede, and of a man he eet.
With soutil pencel depeynted was this storie
In rédoutynge of Mars and of his glorie.

Then comes the temple of Diana the chaste, where Emilia pays her vows : after which, the assembling of the heroes, the combat, and the dénouement—all done with the same minute care and the same admirable art.

A noble story, declares the host enthusiastically ; and looks around for another of the same kind. He calls upon the monk ; but ere that worthy could respond, the miller loudly interposes. He is already so drunk that he can scarcely ride his horse, but he insists with drunken iteration that he will have his turn,

[1] Astrological terms signifying Mars "retrograde" and Mars "direct" respectively.

and the host good-humouredly assents. The miller then begins with a protestation : " I am drunk," he says, " I know it by my voice. So if I say anything amiss, you must blame the strong ale of Southwark." He promises a lively tale of a carpenter and his wife ; but the reeve, a carpenter by trade, is violently angry, and is only calmed when he is allowed to follow the miller with any story he pleases. So the miller tells his uproarious tale, and the reeve retaliates with an equally amusing episode at the expense of millers. But,

> The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this,
> So was the Reeve, and othere manye mo ;

and we must here take the poet's advice, to

> Turne over the leefe and chese another tale ;

for the tales are in keeping with their characters —clever, witty, licentious, steeped in " harlotries " ; Chaucer must tell them or be false to his matter ; he doubtless enjoyed telling them, but he apologizes to every gentle wight and " ther is na mo to seye."

After the reeve, the cook, rolling with laughter, chimes in straightway. " God forbid that we should stop here," he said ; and to continue the good work, he will tell " a little jape that fell in our city." " Go on, Roger," answered the jovial host, " but see that it be a good one " :

> For many a pastee hastow laten blood,
> And many a jakke of Dover hastow soold
> That hath been twiés hoot and twiés coold.

The cook's tale is left unfinished ; but, as it promised to surpass those of the reeve and miller in its coarse farce, there is no reason to repine at that. The host, like Chaucer, no doubt felt that there could easily be too much of a good thing. Possibly the yeoman told the "Tale of Gamelyn" here ; it is inserted in some manuscripts, but is almost certainly not Chaucer's work. The first day's group of tales thus ends abruptly, and the rest of those which were due to be told have not survived to us and probably were never written.

The first night of the pilgrimage, most likely spent at Dartford, seems to have been a lively one ; and next morning the host had to lament a laggard start. It was ten o'clock ere the man of law began his tale. The lawyer's story of the holy Custance and her adventures in the face of all kinds of temptation is a serious one ; it is a kind of allegory of Christianity in its conflict with paganism ; and reduces the company to a more solemn mood than the cook left overnight. The tale was probably written at an earlier period (see p. 59), though the apostrophe to poverty in the prologue seems to reflect some of Chaucer's later experiences. The lawyer was a man "discreet and of great reverence," and his graceful story became his character. So deep was the impression it made that the host called upon the parish priest for a similar one, for "by Goddés bones, you learned men know much good." The gentle parson rebukes the host for his oaths, where-

upon, "I smell a Lollard in the wind," said the host; "now we are in for a sermon, by God's passion." "That he shall not," interposed the breezy shipman.

> He woldè sowen som difficulte
> Or sprengen cokkel in our clene corn.

To prevent which, the shipman himself will tell a jolly tale; and he keeps his word—telling us a story so full of fun that, in spite of its spicy seasoning, not even a lawyer or a parson could refuse to laugh at it, while the monk would perceive its humour even more nearly.

After congratulating the shipman, the host with grave courtesy appeals to the prioress, who willingly responds with the most pathetic and most beautiful of Chaucer's religious poems. It is the story of a wonderful boy, favoured of the Virgin for his sweet holiness, who was murdered by the Jews and thrown into a pit. By a miracle the Virgin reveals the authors of the crime; they are punished by a terrible death; and the young saint is canonized, like the boy, St. Hugh of Lincoln. The story is written with exquisite taste and feeling; it is short, but contains some of Chaucer's loftiest poetry; and it produced a deep hush upon its audience, as it does upon its readers to-day, even though they have learned to dismiss its theme as superstition. In estimating the many-sidedness of Chaucer's genius, this beautiful story of simple piety must be given its due weight.

The mercurial host now turns to Chaucer.

"Who is this man?" he inquires. "Let him have his chance. He is always looking on the ground, but is as shapely in the waist as I. He has an elvish look and enters into none of our jokes. Come, sir—a merry tale, and that quickly." And the grave poet turned his elvish look within, and solemnly there came forth his "Rime of Sir Thopas."

This is an elaborate and absurd parody of the ridiculous poems that made up the chivalrous literature of the day. From such a master of humour as Chaucer the long-winded romance invited satire irresistibly; and this tale of Sir Thopas, ambling monotonously on from point to point, in a jog-trot rhythm and rimes like the jingle of regular bells, provides it unmercifully. No other pilgrim ventures on such a tale: after seeing the exploits of Don Quixote, the boldest knight will lay aside his lance and cuirass. Sir Thopas is indeed an ancestor of Cervantes' famous knight. In a dream he finds himself in love with the Queen of the Fairies; he rides forth, "pricking through a fair forest," in quest of her; on the way he meets the giant Sir Olifaunt; taunts and challenges are interchanged, and Sir Thopas runs away home—to fetch his armour. But before the conflict could occur, the host intervenes. The tale is too learned for him, the speeches too "drasty," or ridiculous. "It is the best rime I can," says Chaucer humbly; whereupon the host replies impatiently, "Tell us something in prose then, something that has mirth or doctrine in it."

Without further argument, Chaucer obliges with the "Tale of Melibœus," a very dreary and quite too moral narrative in prose.

That Chaucer should have chosen as his contribution to the general entertainment a burlesque and a prosy allegory is at first sight singular; but it is in keeping with the general trend of his references to himself. These are always in a vein of humorous self-depreciation, of shy fear lest his more serious self should become too prominent. And so he takes the responsibility for these, the weakest tales, because he will not affect a superiority to his companions. They are an effective foil to their brilliant achievements; he is modestly determined not to be recognized as a great poet, or to be known among the pilgrims for what he really was. This modesty is one of the traits which help to make him one of the most personally lovable of our poets.

Extolling the virtues of the good wife Prudence, the "Tale of Melibœus" pleased the host, who is only sorry that his own wife was not present to hear it. He is voluble in reminiscence, but remembers that Rochester is in sight, and calls upon the monk to tell a serious tale. The monk took the host's chaff in good part and proceeds to set forth his little book of tragedies, a mournful catalogue of illustrious persons who have fallen from their high estates. The stories come from many sources, but mainly from Boccaccio's "De Casibus Illustrium Principum." We have

Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Holofernes, Hercules, Alexander, Nero, Pedro the Cruel, Pierre de Lusignan, among the rest; one of them, Ugolino of Pisa, came direct from Dante, and we will quote this as an example of the monk's style.

Of the erl Hugelyn of Pyzė [1] the langour
Ther may no tongė tellė for pitee;
But litel out of Pizė stant a tour,
In whichė tour in prisoun put was he,
And with hym been his litel children thre;
The eldeste scarsly fyf yeer was of age.
Allas, Fortúne! it was greet crueltee
Swiche briddės for to putte in swiche a cage!

Dampnėd was he to dyen in that prisoun,
For Roger, which that bisshope was of Pize,
Hadde on hym maad a fals suggestioun
Thurgh which the peplė gan upon hym rise
And putten hym to prisoun, in swich wise
As ye han herd, and mete and drynke he hadde
So smal, that wel unnethe it may suffise,
And therwithal it was ful poure and badde.

And on a day bifil that in that hour
Whan that his metė wont was to be broght,
The gayler shette the dorės of the tour.
He herde it wel, but he ne spak right noght,
And in his herte anon ther fil a thoght
That they for hunger woldė doon hym dyen.
"Allas!" quod he, "allas, that I was wroght!"
Therwith the teeris fillen from his eyen.

His yongė sone, that thre yeer was of age,
Unto hym seyde, "Fader, why do ye wepe?

[1] Ugolino of Pisa was starved to death in 1289

Whanne wol the gayler bryngen oure potage ;
Is ther no morsel breed that ye do kepe ?
I am so hungry that I may nat slepe ;
Now woldė God that I myghte slepen evere !
Thanne sholde nat hunger in my wombė crepe ;
Ther is no thyng, but breed, that me were levere."

Thus day by day this child bigan to crye,
Til in his fadrės barm adoun it lay,
And seydė, "Farewel, fader, I moot dye ! "
And kiste his fader, and dyde the samė day ;
And whan the woful fader deed it say,
For wo his armės two he gan to byte,
And seyde, " Allas, Fortúne ! and weyl-away !
Thy falsė wheel my wo al may I wyte ! "

His children wende that it for hunger was
That he his armės gnow, and nat for wo,
And seydė, " Fader, do nat so, allas !
But rather ete the flessh upon us two ;
Oure flessh thou yaf us, take oure flessh us fro,
And ete ynogh,"—right thus they to hym seyde,
And after that, withinne a day or two,
They leyde hem in his lappe adoun and deyde.

Hymself, despeirėd, eek for hunger starf ;
Thus ended is this myghty erl of Pize ;
From heigh estaat Fortúne awey hym carf.
Of this tragédie it oghte ynough suffise.
Whoso wol here it in a lenger wise,
Redeth the gretė poete of Ytaille
That hightė Dant, for he kan al devyse
Fro point to point,—nat o word wol he faille.

Even the courteous knight complains about the long procession of dismal tragedies, and the host caps his reproach with a demand for a

hunting tale. But the monk is not for the moment in a playful mood, and the host "with rude speech and bold" calls upon the nun's priest to tell them something that will glad their heart. Promising to be merry at all events, the "sweet priest" tells one of the masterpieces of the pilgrimage.

This is the well-worn fable of the cock and the fox, and the exemplary manner of its telling has made it at all times one of the favourite treasures of Chaucer. Dryden modernized it in his "Fables," but did not preserve the fine flavour of the original humour; Dryden was a man of genius, but his genius was not closely akin to Chaucer's, and the charm of great poetry is strangely subtle and evanescent. The "Nonnes Prestes Tale" has the full and firm impress of Chaucer's delightful personality—his quizzical humour, his acute observation, his delicate insight into the fine shades of character. Many chanticleers have stalked the world, but none more royally than the hero of this apologue, the moral of which is not insisted upon too keenly, but is there for the least sophisticated reader to see. The first 300 lines which we shall quote, are strictly no more than introductory to the story itself; but they are splendid entertainment for those who understand human foibles; and there is no need to apologize for omitting the battle of wit between the cock and the fox, delightfully though this is rendered by Chaucer. The cock saves his neck at the end, and returns to his dame, sadder

and wiser. He will not trust in flattery again, we trow. The following liberal extract from this poem is given in the hope that the reader will search his Chaucer for the rest. He will then agree cordially with the host that it was "a merry tale of Chanticleer"; he will re-echo the host's congratulation:

Now, sire, faire fallê yow for yourė tale.

A poure wydwė, somdel stape in age,
Was whilom dwellyng in a narwe cotage
Beside a grevė, stondynge in a dale.
This wydwe, of which I tellė yow my tale,
Syn thilkė day that she was last a wyf,
In pacïence ladde a ful symple lyf,
For litel was hir catel and hir rente.
By housbondrie of swich as God hire sente
She foond hirself, and eek hire doghtren two.
Thre largė sowės hadde she, and namo;
Three keen and eek a sheep that hightė Malle.
Ful sooty was hir bour, and eek hire halle,
In which she eet ful many a sklendre meel;
Of poynaunt sauce hir neded never a deel.
No deyntee morsel passėd thurgh hir throte,
Hir diete was accordant to hir cote;
Repleccioun ne made hire never sik,
Attempree diete was al hir phisik,
And exercise, and hertės suffisaunce.
The goutė lette hire no-thyng for to daunce,
Napoplexiė shentė nat hir heed;
No wyn ne drank she, neither whit ne reed;
Hir bord was servėd moost with whit and blak,—
Milk and broun breed,—in which she foond no lak;
Seynd bacoun and somtyme an ey or tweye,
For she was, as it were, a maner deye.

A yeerd she hadde, enclosèd al aboute
With stikkès, and a dryè dych withoute,
In which she hadde a cok, heet Chauntècleer.
In al the land of crowyng nas his peer.
His voys was murier than the murie orgon
On messè dayes that in the chirchè gon ;
Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
Than is a clokke, or an abbey orlogge.
By nature knew he eche ascencioun
Of the equynoxial in thilkè toun ;
For whan degreès fiftene weren ascended,
Thanne crew he that it myghte nat been amended.
His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
And batailled as it were a castel wal ;
His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon ;
Lyk asure were his leggès and his toon ;
His naylès whiter than the lylye flour,
And lyk the burnèd gold was his colour.
This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
Sevene hennès for to doon al his plesaunce,
Whiche were his sustrès and his paramours,
And wonder lyk to hym, as of colours ;
Of whiche the faireste hewèd on hir throte
Was clepèd faire damoysele Pertèlote.
Curteys she was, discreet and debonaire,
And compaignable, and bar hyrself so faire
Syn thilkè day that she was seven nyght oold,
That trewèly she hath the herte in hoold
Of Chauntècleer, loken in every lith ;
He loved hire so that wel was hym therwith ;
But swiche a joye was it to here hem synge,
Whan that the brightè sonne bigan to sprynge,
In sweete accord, " My lief is faren in londe " ;
For thilkè tyme, as I have understonde,
Beestès and briddès koudè speke and synge.

And so bifel, that in the dawėnynge,
As Chauntėcleer among his wyvės alle
Sat on his perchė, that was in the halle,
And next hym sat this fairė Pertelote,
This Chauntėcleer gan gronen in his throte,
As man that in his dreem is drecchėd soore.
And whan that Pertelote thus herde hym roore,
She was agast, and seyde, " O hertė deere !
What eyleth yow, to grone in this manére ?
Ye been a verray sleper ; fy, for shame ! "
And he answerde and seydė thus : " Madame,
I pray yow that ye take it nat agrief ;
By God, me mette I was in swich meschief
Right now, that yet myn herte is soore afright.
Now God," quod he, " my swevene recche aright,
And kepe my body out of foul prisoun !
Me mette how that I romėd up and doun
Withinne our yeerd, wheer as I saugh a beest
Was lyk an hound, and wolde han maad areest
Upon my body, and han had me deed.
His colour was bitwixė yelow and reed,
And tippėd was his tayl, and bothe his eeris,
With blak, unlyk the remenant of his heeris ;
His snowtė smal, with glowynge eyen tweye.
Yet of his look for feere almoost I deye ;
This causėd me my gronyng doutėlees."
" Avoy ! " quod she, " fy on yow, hertėlees !
Allas ! " quod she, " for by that God above !
Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love.
I kan nat love a coward, by my feith !
For certės, what so any womman seith,
We alle desiren, if it myghtė bee,
To han housbóndės hardy, wise, and free,
And secree, and no nygard, ne no fool,
Ne hym that is agast of every tool,

Ne noon avauntour, by that God above !
How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love
That any thyng myghte makė yow aferd ?
Have ye no mannės herte, and han a berd ?
" Allas ! and konne ye been agast of swevenys ?
No thyng, God woot, but vanitee in swevene is.
Swevenes engendren of replecciouns,
And ofte of fume, and of complecciouns,
Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
" Certės this dreem, which ye han met to-nyght,
Cometh of the greet superfluytee
Of youre redė colera, *pardee,*
Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
Of arwės, and of fyre with redė lemes,
Of redė beestės, that they wol hem byte,
Of contekes and of whelpės, grete and lyte ;
Right as the humour of malencolie
Causeth ful many a man in sleepe to crie,
For feere of blakė beres, or bolės blake,
Or ellės blakė develes wole hem take.
Of othere humours koude I telle also
That werken many a man in sleepe ful wo ;
But I wol passe as lightly as I kan.
Lo, Catoun, which that was so wys a man,
Seyde he nat thus, ' Ne do no fors of dremes ' ?
" Now, sire," quod she, " whan we flee fro the bemes,
For Goddės love, as taak som laxatyf.
Up peril of my soule, and of my lyf,
I conseille yow the beste, I wol nat lye,
That bothe of colere and of malencolye
Ye purgė yow, and, for ye shal nat tarie,
Though in this toun is noon apothecarie,
I shal myself to herbės techen yow
That shul been for youre hele, and for youre prow ;

And in oure yeerd tho herbès shal I fynde,
The whiche han of hire propretee by kynde
To purgè yow, bynethe and eek above.
Forget nat this, for Goddès owenè love !
Ye been ful coleryk of complecciouη.
Warè the sonne in his ascencioun
Ne fynde yow nat repleet of humours hoote ;
And if it do, I dar wel leye a grote
That ye shul have a fevere terciane,
Or an agu, that may be yourè bane.
A day or two ye shul have digestyves
Of wormès, or ye take youre laxatyves
Of lawriol, centaure and fumetere,
Or elles of ellèbor that groweth there,
Of katapuce or of gaitrys beryis,
Of herbe yve, growyng in oure yeerd, ther mery is ;
Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem yn ;
Be myrie, housbonde, for youre fader kyn !
Dredeth no dreem ; I kan sey yow namoore."
"Madame," quod he, "*graunt mercy* of youre loore,
But nathèlees, as touchyng daun Catoun,
That hath of wysdom swich a greet renoun,
Though that he bad no dremès for to drede,
By God, men may in oldè bookès rede
Of many a man, moore of auctorite
Than ever Caton was, so moot I thee !
That al the revers seyn of his sentence,
And han wel founden by experience
That dremès been significaciouns
As wel of joye as tribulaciouns,
That folk enduren in this lif present.
Ther nedeth make of this noon argument,
The verray preevè sheweth it in dede.

" Oon of the gretteste auctours that men rede
Seith thus, that whilom two felawès wente
On pilgrimage, in a ful good entente,
And happèd so they coomen in a toun,
Wher as ther was swich congregacioun
Of peple, and eek so streit of herbergage,
That they ne founde as muche as o cotage
In which they bothè myghtè loggèd bee ;
Wherfore they mosten of necessitee,
As for that nyght, departen compaignye ;
And ech of hem gooth to his hostelrye,
And took his loggyng as it woldè falle.
That oon of hem was loggèd in a stalle,
Fer in a yeerd, with oxen of the plough ;
That oother man was loggèd wel ynough,
As was his áventure, or his fortúne,
That us governeth alle as in commune.
" And so bifel that longe er it were day,
This man mette in his bed, ther as he lay,
How that his felawe gan upon hym calle,
And seyde, ' Allas ! for in an oxes stalle
This nyght I shal be mordred ther I lye ;
Now helpe me, deerè brother, or I dye ;
In allè hastè com to me ! ' he seyde.
" This man out of his sleepe for feere abrayde ;
But whan that he was wakened of his sleepe,
He turnèd hym and took of this no keepe ;
Hym thoughte his dreem nas but a vanitee.
Thus twiès in his slepyng dremed hee,
And attè thriddè tyme yet his felawe
Cam, as hym thoughte, and seide, ' I am now
slawe !
Bihoold my bloody woundès, depe and wyde ;
Arys up erly in the morwè tyde,
And at the west gate of the toun,' quod he,

'A cartė ful of donge ther shaltow se,
In which my body is hid ful privėly ;
Do thilkė carte arresten boldėly ;
My gold causėd my mordrė, sooth to sayn.'
And tolde hym every point how he was slayn,
With a ful pitous facė, pale of hewe ;
And trustė wel, his dreem he foond ful trewe ;
For on the morwe, as soone as it was day,
To his felawės in he took the way,
And whan that he cam to this oxes stalle,
After his felawe he bigan to calle.

"The hostiler answerdė hym anon
And seydė, 'Sire, your felawe is agon ;
As soone as day he wente out of the toun.'

"This man gan fallen in suspecioun,—
Remembrynge on his dremės, that he mette,—
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he lette,
Unto the west gate of the toun, and fond
A dong carte, as it were to dongė lond,
That was arrayėd in that samė wise
As ye han herd the dedė man devyse ;
And with an hardy herte he gan to crye
Vengeance and justice of this felonye.
'My felawe mordred is this samė nyght,
And in this carte he lith gapyng upright.
I crye out on the ministres,' quod he,
'That sholden kepe and reulen this citee ;
Harrow ! allas ! heere lith my felawe slayn ! '
What sholde I moore unto this talė sayn ?
The peple out sterte and caste the cart to grounde,
And in the myddel of the dong they founde
The dedė man, that mordred was al newe.

"O blisful God, that art so just and trewe !
Lo, how that thou biwreyest mordre alway !
Mordrė wol out, that se we day by day ;

Mordre is so wlatsom, and abhomynable
To God, that is so just and resonable,
That he ne wol nat suffre it helėd be,
Though it abyde a yeer, or two, or thre ;
Mordrė wol out, this my conclusioun.
And right anon, ministres of that toun
Han hent the carter, and so soore hym pyned,
And eek the hostiler so soore engyned,
That they biknewe hire wikkednesse anon,
And were an-hanged by the nekkė bon.
"Heere may men seen that dremės been to drede ;
And certės, in the samė book I rede,
Right in the nextė chapitre after this,—
I gabbė nat, so have I joye or blis,—
Two men that wolde han passėd over see,
For certeyn cause, into a fer contree,
If that the wynd ne haddė been contrarie,
That made hem in a citee for to tarie
That stood ful myrie upon an haven syde ;
But on a day, agayn the even-tyde,
The wynd gan chaunge, and blew right as hem leste.
Jolif and glad they wente unto hir reste,
And casten hem ful erly for to saille.
"But to that o man fil a greet mervaille ;
That oon of hem in slepyng as he lay,
Hym mette a wonder dreem, agayn the day :
Him thoughte a man stood by his beddės syde
And hym comanded that he sholde abyde,
And seyde hym thus : 'If thou tomorwė wende,
Thou shalt be dreynt, my tale is at an ende.'
"He wook, and tolde his felawe what he mette,
And preydė hym his viage for to lette ;
As for that day, he preydė hym to byde.

His felawe, that lay by his beddès syde,
Gan for to laughe, and scornèd him ful faste ;
'No dreem,' quod he, 'may so myn herte agaste,
That I wol lettè for to do my·thynges ;
I settè not a straw by thy dremynges,
For swevenes been but vanytees and japes ;
Men dreme al day of owlès or of apes,
And eke of many a mazè therwithal ;
Men dreme of thyng that never was ne shal ;
But sith I see that thou wolt heere abyde,
And thus forslewthen wilfully thy tyde,
God woot it reweth me, and have good day ! '
And thus he took his leve, and wente his way ;
But er that he hadde half his cours y-seyled,
Noot I nat why, ne what myschaunce it eyled,
But casuelly the shippès botmè rente,
And shipe and man under the water wente
In sighte of othere shippès it bisyde,
That with hem seylèd at the samè tyde !
And therfore, fairè Pertèlote so deere,
By swiche ensamplès olde yet maistow leere,
That no man sholdè been to recchelees
Of dremès, for I seye thee doutèlees,
That many a dreem ful soore is for to drede.
" Lo, in the lyf of Seint Kenelm I rede,
That was Kenulphus sone, the noble kyng
Of Mercenrike,[1] how Kenelm mette a thyng.
A lite er he was mordred, on a day
His mordre in his avysioun he say.
His norice hym expownèd every deel
His swevene, and bad hym for to kepe hym weel
For traisoun ; but he nas but seven yeer oold,
And therfore litel talè hath he toold
Of any dreem, so hooly was his herte.

[1] Mercia. St. Kenelm was murdered at the suggestion of his sister by his teacher.

By God, I haddė levere than my sherte
That ye hadde rad his legende as have I.
Dame Pertėlote, I sey yow trewėly,
Macrobeus,[1] that writ the avisioun
In Affrike of the worthy Cipioun,
Affermeth dremes, and seith that they been
Warnynge of thyngės that men after seen ;
And forther-moore, I pray yow looketh wel
In the Oldė Testament of Daniel,
If he heeld dremės any vanitee.
" Reed eek of Joseph, and ther shul ye see
Wher dremės be somtyme,—I sey nat alle,—
Warnynge of thyngės that shul after falle.
Looke of Egipte the kyng, daun Pharao,
His baker and his butiller also,
Wher they ne feltė noon effect indremes.
Whoso wol seken actes of sondry remes
May rede of dremės many a wonder thyng.
" Lo, Cresus, which that was of Lydė kyng,
Mette he nat that he sat upon a tree,
Which signified he sholde anhanged bee ?
" Lo heere Andromacha, Ectorės wyf,
That day that Ector sholdė lese his lyf,
She dremėd on the samė nyght biforn,
How that the lyf of Ector sholde be lorne,
If thilkė day he wente into bataille ;
She warnėd hym, but it myghte nat availle ;
He wentė forth to fightė nathėles,
And he was slayn anon of Achilles ;
But thilkė tale is al to longe to telle,
And eek it is ny day, I may nat dwelle ;
Shortly I seye, as for conclusioun,
That I shal han of this avisioun
Adversitee ; and I seye forthermoor,

[1] A fourth-century commentator on Cicero's "Somnium Scipionis."

That I ne telle of laxatyves no stoor,
For they been venymés, I woot it weel ;
I hem diffye, I love hem never a deel ! ''

With this the cock leaps proudly from his perch, and ere long falls victim to the wiles of the fox ; he escapes by touching Reynard's vanity also on its weak side : the episode is told with the same humour and the same learning, lightly and attractively used, as we find in our introductory matter.

After sleeping, it would seem at Rochester, the pilgrims begin the third day with a tale from the doctor. This turned out to be a pitiful tragedy, no other than the story of the chaste Virginia, found in Livy, but taken by Chaucer from the '' Roman de la Rose.'' The host's feelings were so excited by the scant sense of justice shown by Virginia's father that he swore roundly like a madman, and sarcastically suggested to the doctor that he might make a better use of his medical knowledge than that of harrowing their minds with such bloody details. His heart is lost for pity of the maid ; he must have mirth or japes '' right anon.'' Therefore he calls upon the pardoner.

'' Certainly,'' said the ready pardoner ; '' but I must first drink and eat.''

'' No ribaldry,'' the gentles cry in chorus. '' But tell us some moral thing, from which we may learn something.''

'' I grant you that. I will think of some honest thing over my ale,'' answered the

obliging pardoner. And forthwith he enters upon a long preamble, which is one of Chaucer's most finished pieces of self-revelation.

"Lordynges," quod he, "in chirchés whan I preche,
I peyné me to han an hauteyn speche,
And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rotè that I telle.
My theme is alwey oon, and ever was,—
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.
"First, I pronouncè whennès that I come,
And thanne my bullès shewe I, alle and some;
Oure ligè lordès seel on my patente,
That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so boold, ne preest, ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristès hooly werk;
And, after that, thanne telle I forth my tales,
Bullès of popès and of cardynales,
Of patriarkes and bishoppès I shewe,
And in Latyn I speke a wordès fewe
To saffron with my predicacioun,[1]
And for to stire hem to devocioun;
Thanne shewe I forth my longè cristal stones
Y-crammèd ful of cloutès and of bones,—
Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder boon
Which that was of an hooly Jewès sheepe.
"'Goode men, I seye,' 'taak of my wordès keepe,—
If that this boon be wasshe in any welle,
If cow, or calf, or sheepe, or oxè swelle
That any worm hath ete, or worm y-stonge,
Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge,

[1] *I.e.* to give a pleasant flavour to my sermon—the pardoner understands the use of saffron in cookery!

And it is hool anon ; and forthermoor
Of pokkės, and of scabbe, and every soor,
Shal every sheepe be hool that of this welle
Drynketh a draughte. Taak kepe eek what I telle.
If that the goode-man that the beestės oweth
Wol every wyke, er that the cok hym croweth,
Fastyngė, drinken of this welle a draughte,
As thilkė hooly Jew oure eldrės taughte,
His beestės and his stoor shal multiplie.
And, sires, also it heeleth jalousie,
For though a man be falle in jalous rage,
Lat maken with this water his potage,
And never shal he moore his wyf mystriste,
Though he the soothe of hir defautė wiste,—
Al had she taken preestes two or thre.
Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se ;
He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn,
He shall have multipliyng of his grayn,
Whan he hath sowėn, be it whete or otes,
So that he offrė pens, or ellės grotes.
" ' Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow,
If any wight be in this chirchė now
That hath doon synnė horrible, that he
Dar nat for shame of it y-shryven be,
Or any womman, be she yong or old,
That hath y-maad hir housbonde cokėwold,
Swich folk shal have no power ne no grace
To offren to my relikes in this place ;
And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame
They wol come up and offre on Goddės name,
And I assoille hem by the auctoritee
Which that by bulle y-graunted was to me.'
" By this gaude have I wonnė, yeer by yeer,
An hundred mark sith I was Pardoner.

I stondė lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
And whan the lewėd peple is doun y-set,
I precho so as ye han herd bifoore,
And telle an hundred falsė japės moore ;
Thanne peyne I me to strecchė forth the nekke,
And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
As dooth a dowvė, sittynge on a berne ;
Myne handės and my tongė goon so yerne,
That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me ;
For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,
And no thyng for correccioun of synne.
I rekkė never whan that they been beryed,
Though that hir soulės goon a-blakė-beryed ;
For certės many a predicacioun
Comth oftė tyme of yvel entencioun ;
Som for plesaunce of folk and flaterye,
To been avaunced by ypocrisye ;
And som for veynė glorie, and som for hate,
For whan I dar noon oother weyes debate,
Thanne wol I stynge hym with my tongė smerte
In prechyng, so that he shal nat asterte
To been defamėd falsly, if that he
Hath trespased to my bretheren or to me ;
For though I tellė noght his proprė name,
Men shal wel knowė that it is the same,
By signės, and by othere circumstances.
Thus quyte I folk that doon us displesances ;
Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe
Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe.
" But, shortly, myn entente I wol devyse,—
I preche of no thyng but for coveityse ;
Therfore my theme is yet and ever was,

Radix malorum est Cupiditas.
Thus kan I preche agayn that samė vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice ;
But though myself be gilty in that synne
Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice, and soorė to repente ;
But that is nat my principal entente ;
I prechė no thyng but for coveitise.
Of this mateere it oghte ynogh suffise.
" Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon
Of oldė stories longė tyme agoon,—
For lewėd peple loven talės olde,—
Swiche thyngės kan they wel reporte and holde.
What ! trowė ye, the whilės I may preche,
And wynnė gold and silver for I teche,
That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully ?
Nay, nay, I thoghte it never, trewėly,
For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes ;
I wol nat do no labour with myne handes,
Ne makė baskettės and lyve therby,
By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly.
I wol noon of the Apostles countrefete,
I wol have moneie, wollė, chese and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
Or of the povereste wydwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.
Nay, I wol drynkė licour of the vyne,
And have a joly wenche in every toun ;
But herkneth, lordynges, in conclusioun.
" Youre likyng is that I shal telle a tale.
Now have I dronke a draughte of corny ale,
By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng
That shal by resoun been at youre likyng ;
For though myself be a ful vicious man,
A moral tale yet I yow tellė kan,

Which I am wont to prechė, for to wynne.
Now hoold youre pees, my tale I wol bigynne."

Was ever a more thorough portrait of hypocrisy naked and unashamed, of unblushing greed, painted by poet or satirist? Not Juvenal's pen, nor Hogarth's brush, has exposed a more monstrous parasite upon the credulous than this. With a grim irony, his theme is *Radix malorum est Cupiditas,* and the burden of his tale is the same text.

Three men find a great treasure, and one of their number is sent to a neighbouring town to hire a cart for its removal. The two watchers, concluding that it would be better to divide the gold between two than three, resolve to murder their comrade on his return. This they do; but that young man had also a greedy soul, and had brought back with him some poisoned wine. The two murderers drink this, and die; and thus they all pay the price of their covetousness. The tale is told vividly and with spirit, and the trail of the pardoner himself can be followed right through it. Even at the end, after his solemn warning against avarice, the old Adam emerges in full flower. "I forgot to tell you," he says, "that I have some splendid relics in my wallet, as fine as any man in England. You ought all to feel it a privilege to have with you a pardoner who carries with him the pope's absolution. Come, sir Host,—you first! You shall kiss every relic I have for a groat. Open your purse!"

The host's scornful words are unprintable, and would have led to violent quarrel, had not the knight intervened.

It would be a bold thing to say that Chaucer never told a tale more apposite to its teller than this of the pardoner, when the very next person we come across is the immortal wife of Bath, talking volubly about her five husbands. In her long and gossipy prologue, that outspoken lady develops her character in the same manner as the pardoner has done. She is certainly a great deal less contemptible than he; her vulgarity is by no means so offensive as his hypocrisy; but she is essentially a satirical figure, a contrast with the prim and formal prioress, but representing the average womanhood of the time, somewhat soiled by its experiences, yet carrying everything off with its abundance of animal spirits. Her frankness and her unconventional manners make it difficult to quote from the humorous autobiography with which she preludes her tale. She has no modesty, no respect for delicate ears; it is the friar and the summoner that are tickled with her wit: her racy enjoyment of herself captivates such lovers of the scandalous as the cook or the miller; but what the knight and the prioress thought is not recorded, and Chaucer himself only shows by the delicate irony which plays like a luminescence upon the poem in what light he regarded her.

Five husbands she had had, and first she must justify herself. She pleads simply that she is

no saint. Virginity is a good and holy thing—for perfect women, which, by your leave, she was not. She has been wed five times ; and what she cannot tell about husbands and their ways no woman can. Three of hers were good and rich and old ; they loved her devoutly, and she took full advantage of the fact.

> The bacoun was not fet for hem, I trowe,
> That som men han in Essexe at Dunmowe.

Fine things from the fair they brought her, and

> They were ful glad whan I spak to him faire,
> For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.

After which proud admission she gives us a few unbecoming examples of her spiteful tongue. Moreover, she plagues them in still more illicit ways ; and when they would complain

> I pleynèd first, so was our werre y-stent.

Though she were guilty and they innocent, she could rage and whine, bite and swear, so well that they were happy to purchase peace at the price of guilt. Woman's wit, turning to "deceit, weeping, spinning," was given her at her birth. Was she not to use it ?

The fourth husband was as bad as she : he had a lover and she herself was "jolly as a pie." She enjoyed herself so

> That in his owene greece I made him frye
> For angre, and for verray jalousye.
> By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie.

Before he was dead, she had promised herself

in the event of widowhood to a neighbour's lodger, a clerk of Oxenford named Jankyn. This fifth husband was almost equal to the burden he undertook to bear. He was fond of books, and one especially he would often read that caused him much unseemly mirth. And one night, as they sat by the fireside, he read aloud for Alice's benefit tale after tale of men who had been ruined by the wiles of women. Adam, Samson, Hercules, Socrates, and a monotonous string of lesser fry he droned out ruthlessly, to point his moral that woman is the spring of all evil,—all which Dame Alice heard with slowly waxing wrath.

And whan I saugh he woldė never fyne
To reden on this cursėd book al nyght,
Al sodeynly thre levės have I plyght
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took hym on the cheke,
That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun ;
And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,
And with his fest he smoot me on the heed,
That in the floor I lay as I were deed ;
And whan he saugh how stillė that I lay,
He was agast and wolde han fled his way,
Til attė laste out of my swogh I breyde.
" O hastow slayn me, falsė theef ? " I seyde ;
" And for my land thus hastow mordred me ?
Er I be deed, yet wol I kissė thee."
And neer he cam, and knelėd faire adoun,
And seydė, " Deerė suster Alisoun !
As help me God, I shal thee never smyte.
That I have doon it is thyself to wyte ;
Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke " ;

And yet, eft-soones, I hitte hym on the cheke,
And seyde, "Theef ! thus muchel am I wreke.
Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke."
But attè laste, with muchel care and wo,
We fille acorded by us selven two.
He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge, and of his hond also,
And made hym brenne his book anon right tho ;
And whan that I hadde geten unto me
By maistrie al the sovèraynètee,—
And that he seyde, "Myn owene trewè wyf,
Do as thee lust to terme of al thy lyf ;
Keepe thyn honour, and keepe eek myn estaat,"—
After that day we hadden never debaat.
God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
And also trewe, and so was he to me.
I prey to God, that sit in magestee,
So blesse his soulè for his mercy deere.
Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere.

Thus was she at last overcome ! "But this is a long preamble," said the friar amid his laughter. The summoner, however, took the opportunity of expressing his approval by a cutting criticism of the friar, his enemy : "friars, like flies, settle in every dish." "You carry on like drunken men," cried the host, as their words wax hot. "Let the woman tell her tale." Having the "licence of this worthy Frere," she ends her preface and comes to the banquet itself.

A young knight at King Arthur's court, having committed a deadly crime, is promised

pardon if, within twelve months and a day, he can bring an answer to the question, "What is it that women most desire?" In sore distress at the dilemma, he seeks the answer everywhere, but nowhere finds anyone who can give him that which he needs, till an old woman, foul and ugly beyond expression, promises him satisfaction if he will reward her by doing the very next thing she may require of him. On his honour he grants her request; a few words she whispers in his ear; and with these he wins his life. "Women desire most to rule over their husbands, and every one, so as to be master over him in all things." For this oracle, he is called upon to make the hag his wife. With much murmuring, and in the spirit of a man doomed, he keeps his word. Much discussion of wives and husbands, love and marriage, ensues, until the young knight is astounded to see the filthy crone transformed into a young lady of wondrous beauty. Thus is he rewarded for his faith and honour. And they live happy to their lives' end, and may Christ send us all meek husbands, and destroy those men who will not be governed by their wives.

Again the friar is delighted; but, while we may admire the skill with which the wife of Bath is made to reveal her talkative self through the tale, we must also acknowledge that as a story it is too discursive. Dame Alice is a gossip to the end, and rather spoils her story thereby.

The next tale is that of the friar, which is

really a very witty exposure of the villainies of the average summoner, and it is followed by the summoner's retaliation on the friar. Both tales are narrated with strong comic power and a compelling satirical force ; but the summoner's especially, though full of real humour, cannot be quoted here. We may venture to give the summoner's prologue, however, as an indication of the spirit in which the tales were told.

This Somonour in his styropes hyė stood.
Upon this Frere his hertė was so wood,
That lyk an aspen leef he quook for ire.
" Lordynges," quod he, " but o thyng I desire,—
I yow biseke that of youre curteisye,
Syn ye han herd this falsė Frere lye,
As suffereth me I may my talė telle.
" This Frerė bosteth that he knoweth helle,
And God it woot, that it is litel wonder ;
Frerės and feendės been but lyte asonder ;
For, *pardee !* ye han oftė tyme herd telle
How that a frerė ravysshed was to helle
In spirit onės by a visioun ;
And as an angel ladde hym up and doun,
To shewen hym the peynės that ther were,
In al the placė saugh he nat a frere.
Of oother folk he saugh ynowe in wo.
Unto this angel spak the frerė tho :
" ' Now, sire,' quod he, ' han frerės swich a grace
That noon of hem shal comė to this place ? '
" ' Yis,' quod this angel, ' many a millioun ' ;
And unto Sathanas he ladde hym doun,
And now hath Sathanas, seith he, a tayl,
Brodder than of a carryk is the sayl.
' Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas,' quod he,

' Shewe forth thyn ers, and lat the frerė se
Where is the nest of frerės in this place ' ;
And er that half a furlong wey of space,
Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve,
Out of the develes ers ther gonnė dryve
Twénty thousand frerės in a route,
And thurgh-out hellė swarmėden aboute,
And comen agayn as faste as they may gon,
And in his ers they crepten everychon ;
He clapte his tayl agayn and lay ful stille.
This frere, whan he hadde lookėd al his fille
Upon the tormentz of this sory place,
His spirit God restorėd of his grace
Unto his body agayn, and he awook ;
But nathėles, for ferė yet he quook,
So was the develes ers ay in his mynde ;
That is his heritage of verray kynde.
God save yow allė, save this cursėd Frere !
My prologe wol I ende in this manere."

The next tale that apparently belongs to the second day of the pilgrimage is of a very different order. Lest we should think that Chaucer's mind runs too much into the direction of broad farce, he gives us the clerk's touching story of patient Griselda. Coy as a maid, the clerk has been up to this time merely a listener. The host playfully chides him to tell a merry tale and thus do as others do ; but " do not preach to us, like friars in Lent, for we do not want to fall asleep." Thus urged, the poor student answers modestly that he will recount a tale—not his own, but one he learned at Padua of the worthy clerk, Francesco Petrarch.

The tale of Griselda has been often, but not too often, praised for its pure and pathetic simplicity. Griselda is the low-born wife of Walter, Marquis of Seluce, and is as good as she is beautiful. Patience is her cardinal quality, submission to her husband's will her rule of life. But he does not appreciate her virtue aright : he must test it by ingenious cruelties. Two children are born to them, and these he orders to be taken away from her on the plea that the people murmur at their plebeian blood. And later, after some fourteen years of wedded life—long enough to have made him know his spouse, we might suppose, without further tests —he declares to her that he must seek a new wife from afar. Griselda is therefore sent back to her father, but not to be left in peace : she must assist at the royal wedding-feast that is preparing. Finally the bride is presented to her. Then her husband's stupid career of torture breaks down ; she pleads with him, not for herself, but for the young girl, who looked too frail to endure what she had endured. In face of this, he reveals his trick. The bride is Griselda's daughter ; her son, too, is soon restored to her and the end is a reconciliation and happiness which Walter by no means deserves.

Griselda is of course an unusual character—much too good to be regarded as an average example of wifehood ; and in the envoy to the tale Chaucer makes this quite clear (see p. 33). Nevertheless we must not suppose that Chaucer

wrote the story in any spirit of irony. On the contrary, the pathos is true and genuine, without a symptom of mawkishness ; no one can doubt the deep emotion aroused at the crises of Griselda's life—when she is parted from her children, and when again she is restored to them. The poet's heart was in the story : he was Griselda's champion from start to finish, not because wives often are, or indeed ought to be, like her, but because she really was a treasure to her husband and he was too obtuse to perceive it. Chaucer often showed himself, in fact, in other lights conspicuous, but has not so frequently shown himself master of the delicate sympathy, almost feminine in its tenderness and grace, that we find here.

After the poet's satirical envoy, the merchant is the first to speak. "Weeping and wailing, care and other woes," he exclaims, "I know enough, and so do many more. I have only been wedded three months, sir Host, but it would take me long and cost me infinite sorrow to tell my wife's cursedness."

"Since you know so much," quoth the host, "I beg you cordially to tell your part."

The merchant's tale deals with the trials of an elderly man who has himself been a rake and is married to a gay young girl not out of her teens. It has been modernized by Pope under the title "January and May" ; but the original is much better than the adaptation. Skilful as a story, and by no means deficient in Chaucer's delicate touches of humour, it is

nevertheless unsuitable for quotation here. "God keep me from such a wife," cried our host. "Lo what sleights and subtleties are there in women! As busy as bees are they in weaving tricks to deceive us men. But I am a happy man—my wife is true as steel. Certainly she has a shrewish tongue, and I am sorely sorry that I am tied to her. I dare not tell you all her vices—it might be reported to her—women do get hold of strange gossip—so my tale is done." With these words ends the third day.

Next morning it is the squire who is first called upon, the young and lusty bachelor.

> Squier, come neer, if it youre willë be,
> And sey somwhat of love; for certes ye
> Konnen theron as muche as any man.

Modestly putting aside the flattery, the squire commences to tell "the story of Cambuscan bold"—to quote the famous words from Milton's "Il Penseroso"—and that of the lady Canace, his daughter, the horse of brass, the magic ring and mirror. Unfortunately a most promising poem is left unfinished with no clear hint what the end was to be. The fragment that we have is rich in romantic lore, culled directly or indirectly from Arabian sources; it has motives often met in the "Arabian Nights," derived by Chaucer—to some extent at least—from Marco Polo's travels; and it is written in Chaucer's strongest and loftiest verse. "Cambyuscan" is a corruption of the name of the

great Tartar conqueror Chinghiz Khan ; but the description is more suggestive of his grandson, Kubla Khan, as portrayed in Marco Polo. He is a fortunate and honourable king—" his courage as any centre stable " ; nowhere was there such another man. And after he had reigned twenty years, he celebrated his birthday by a great feast in his city of Sarray. When they had reached the third course of the banquet and he was listening delightedly to his minstrels, a strange knight entered suddenly, mounted on a horse of brass, carrying in his hand a large mirror of glass and wearing a gold ring upon his thumb.

With solemn ceremony he set these presents from the King of India and Arabia before the king. The horse, said he, if properly " writhed " with a pin, will transport you whither you will, along the earth or up in the air. The mirror is for my lady Canace, and she will be able to read in it the treasons of her friends and lovers. The ring will enable her to converse with the birds and understand their meanings. This sword by my side will carve asunder the thickest armour, and any man that is wounded with it can only be healed by stroking the wound with its flat face. Thus speaking, the knight lay down his presents, and was escorted to his chamber.

The sword and mirror were borne away to the safety of a lofty tower ; the ring was handed to Canace, as she sat ; but the horse stood still where it was left, and no man could move it.

There it must stand until the knight should teach them the art.

Greet was the prees that swarmeth to and fro
To gauren on this hors that stondeth so ;
For it so heigh was, and so brood and long,
So wel proporcionèd for to been strong,
Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye ;
Ther-with so horsly, and so quyk of eye,
As it a gentil Poilleys[1] courser were ;
For certès, fro his tayl unto his ere,
Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende
In no degree, as al the peple wende.
But evermoore hir moostè wonder was
How that it koudè go, and was of bras !
It was of fairye, as al the peple semed.
Diversè folk diversèly they demed ;
As many heddes as manye wittes ther been.
They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been,
And maden skiles after hir fantasies,
Rehersynge of thise oldè poetries ;
And seyde that it was lyk the Pegasee,[2]
The hors that haddè wyngès for to flee ;
Or elles it was the Grekès hors, Synoun,[3]
That broghtè Troiè to destruccioun,
As men may in thise oldè geestès rede.
"Myn herte," quod oon, "is evermoore in drede ;
I trowe som men of armès been ther-inne,
That shapen hem this citee for to wynne ;
It were right good that al swich thyng were knowe."
Another rownèd to his felawe lowe,
And seyde, "He lyeth ! it is rather lyk

[1] Apulian. In the S.E. of Italy, Apulia was famed for its horses.
[2] The famous winged horse of Bellerophon.
[3] Notice the curious construction. Sinon was the Greek who led the magic horse that entered Troy.

An apparence, y-maad by som magyk ;
As jogelours pleyen at thise feestès grete."
Of sondry doutès thus they jangle and trete,
As lewèd peple demeth comunly
Of thyngès that been maad moore subtilly
Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende,
They demen gladly to the badder ende.
And somme of hem wondred on the mirour
That born was up into the hyè tour,
How men myghte in it swichè thyngès se.
Another answerde and seyde it myghte wel be
Naturelly, by composiciouns
Of angles, and of slye reflexiouns ;
And seyden that in Romè was swich oon.
They speken of Alocen[1] and Vitulon,[2]
And Aristotle, that writen in hir lyves
Of queyntè mirours, and of prospectives,
As knowen they that han hir bookès herd.
And oother folk han wondred on the swerd
That woldè percen thurghout every thyng ;
And fille in speche of Thelophus[3] the kyng,
And of Achilles with his queyntè spere,
For he koude with it bothè heele and dere,
Right in swich wise as men may with the swerd
Of which right now ye han youre-selven herd.
They speken of sondry hardyng of metal,
And speke of medicynès therwithal,
And how and whanne it sholde y-harded be,
Which is unknowe, algatès unto me.
Tho speekè they of Canacëes ryng,
And seyden alle that swich a wonder thyng
Of craft of ryngès herde they never noon ;

[1] Alhazen, the Arabian astronomer (d. 1038).
[2] Vitello, a Polish mathematician, lived in the thirteenth century.
[3] Telephus, king of Mysia, wounded by the spear of Achilles and healed by the rust from the same.

Save that he Moyses and kyng Salomon
Hadden a name of konnyng in swich art ;
Thus seyn the peple and drawen hem apart.
But nathélees somme seiden that it was
Wonder to maken of fern-asshen glas,
And yet nys glas nat lyk asshen of fern,
But for they han i-knowen it so fern
Therfore cesseth hir janglyng and hir wonder.
As soorė wondren somme on cause of thonder,
On ebbe, on flood, on gossomer, and on myst,
And on alle thyng til that the cause is wyst,
Thus jangle they, and demen and devyse,
Til that the kyng gan fro the bord aryse.
Phebus hath laft the angle meridional,[1]
And yet ascendynge was the beest roial,
The gentil Leon, with his Aldrian,[2]
Whan that this Tartrė kyng Cambyuskan
Roos fro his bord, ther as he sat ful hye.
To-forn hym gooth the loudė mynstralcye
Til he cam to his chambre of parementz ;
Ther as they sownen diverse instrumentz
That it is lyk an hevene for to heere.
Now dauncen lusty Venus children deere,
For in the Fyssh hir lady sat ful hye,[3]
And looketh on hem with a freendly eye.
This noble kyng is set up in his trone ;
This strangė knyght is fet to hym ful soone,
And on the daunce he gooth with Canacee.
Heere is the revel and the jolitee
That is nat able a dul man to devyse ;
He moste han knowen love and his servyse,

[1] The sun has crossed the meridian, *i.e.* it is past noon.
[2] This star is not absoluteiy known. The two lines mean that the feast was kept up while Leo was still ascending, which seems to mean till about two or three o'clock.
[3] When Venus is in Piscis, she is said to exert most power upon lovers !

And been a feestlych man, as fressh as May,
That sholdė yow devysen swich array.
Who koudė tellė yow the forme of daunces
So unkouthe, and so fresshė conténaunces,
Swich subtil lookyng and dissymulynges
For drede of jalouse mennes aperceyvynges ?
No man but Launcelet, and he is deed.
Therfore I passe of al this lustiheed ;
I sey namoore, but in this jolynesse
I lete hem til men to the soper dresse.
The styward byt the spices for to hye,
And eek the wyn, in al this melodye.
The usshers and the squiers been y-goon,
The spices and the wyn is come anoon.
They ete and drynke, and whan this hadde an ende,
Unto the temple, as reson was, they wende.
The service doon they soupen al by day ;
What nedeth yow rehercen hire array ?
Ech man woot wel that a kyngės feeste
Hath plentee to the mooste and to the leeste,
And deyntees mo than been in my knowyng.
At after soper gooth this noble kyng
To seen this hors of bras, with all the route
Of lordės and of ladyes hym aboute.
Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras
That syn the gretė sege of Troiė was,—
Ther as men wondreden on an hors also,—
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho.
But fynally, the kyng axeth this knyght
The vertu of this courser, and the myght,
And preydė hym to telle his governaunce.
This hors anoon bigan to trippe and daunce
Whan that this knyght leyde hand upon his reyne,
And seydė, " Sire, ther is namoore to seyne,

But whan yow list to ryden anywhere
Ye mooten trille a pyn, stant in his ere,
Which I shal tellė yow bitwix us two.
Ye mootė nempne hym to what place also,
Or to what contree, that yow list to ryde ;
And whan ye come ther as yow list abyde,
Bidde hym descende, and trille another pyn,—
For therin lith theffect of al the gyn,—
And he wol doun descende and doon youre wille,
And in that placė he wol stondė stille.
Though al the world the contrarie hadde y-swore,
He shal nat thennės been y-drawe ne y-bore ;
Or, if yow listė bidde hym thennės goon,
Trillė this pyn, and he wol vanysshe anoon
Out of the sighte of every maner wight,
And come agayn, be it by day or nyght,
Whan that yow list to clepen hym ageyn
In swich a gyse as I shal to yow seyn,
Bitwixė yow and me, and that ful soone.
Ride whan yow list, ther is namoore to doone."

Enformėd whan the kyng was of that knyght,
And hath conceyvėd in his wit aright
The manere and the forme of al this thyng,
Ful glad and blithe this noble doughty kyng
Repeireth to his revel as biforn.

The brydel is unto the tour y-born
And kept among his jueles leeve and deere,
The hors vanysshed, I noot in what manere,
Out of hir sighte,—ye gete namoore of me ;
But thus I lete in lust and jolitee
This Cambyuskan his lordės festeiynge,
Til wel ny the day bigan to sprynge.

Next day Canace rises early, and goes forth in the morning with a dozen of her maids to hear the music of the birds, which, thanks to

her ring, she can now understand. Through her magic she learns the love-woes of an unfortunate falcon betrayed by a false tercelet. The poet then promises to tell us of Cambalo and how he fought in lists for Canace. But he did not; both this and the significance of the bird-romance are left for us to guess at. Possibly Chaucer found the story too big for his scheme; possibly the listlessness of old age nipped his creative energies; possibly even death itself employed its fatal shears upon this ripe fruit of the poet's life. Whatever be the cause, the incompleteness of the squire's tale is in every way a regrettable fact. For, like the franklin, we may well assert that no one of the pilgrims surpassed the gentle squire in eloquence and learning.

It was his courtly speech that especially appealed to the franklin. "I have a son," he said, "and I would give twenty pounds, if he had only a share of your discretion. I have snubbed him often, but he will not listen to wisdom. He would sooner gamble his substance at dice, than consort with gentlemen."

"A straw for your gentlemen!" quoth our host. "Each of you has a tale to tell, if he does not intend to break his behest."

"Very well," said the franklin apologetically. "It was an honour to speak to this young gentleman. I will obey your will, and do my best."

The franklin's tale is a simple Breton romance of love, chivalry and magic. Dorigen,

the wife of Arviragus, attracts the love of a young squire named Aurelius. When he declares his uncontrollable love to her, she replies that she will never be an untrue wife, but that, if he can remove the cliffs and rocks of the shore, she will yield to his love. Aurelius left Dorigen in despair at so impossible a condition. But by the aid of a magician the impossible was accomplished, and Aurelius claimed his reward. Confessing everything to her husband, Dorigen asks for his guidance. "Rather be false to your marriage vow than to your pledged word," is the gist of his advice. And so in great distress she went to meet Aurelius as she promised. But he, learning of the great generosity of Arviragus, releases Dorigen from her bond, and she returns to her husband. Aurelius in his turn is released from his impossible debt to the magician who helped him.

Everich of yow dide gentilly til other,

says the philosopher at the close; and this gives great pleasure to the good franklin, who, like a hearty homely Englishman, is delighted to leave his hero and heroine to "live happily ever after."

The next tale, according to the accepted order, is that Life of St Cecilia to which reference has already been made (p. 56). It is told by the second nun who is in attendance on the prioress, and has no introductory lines to connect it with the previous tale. It need not therefore surprise us, though it makes little

difference, that some editors place the fragment in which it occurs a little earlier in the sequence of tales, immediately before the doctor's tale. Other displacements have also been made ; in the absence of links and references this is inevitable, but the broad outline of the journey remains very much what is here set forth.

An appropriate link connects the second nun's tale with an intrusion that seems at first quite unwarrantable. Near Boughton-under-Blee, the pilgrims overtook a canon attended by a yeoman. Both were courteous, and anxious to join the jolly party, to which course the host readily consented, and he and the yeoman were soon deep in friendly conversation. "My master is a very wise and clever man, much more than a canon," whispers the yeoman, and proceeds to hint at various questionable practices of his master, who, overhearing, rides away for shame. The yeoman then tells the whole secret : his master is an alchemist of the lowest swindling type, who, with a jargon of technical terms—incorporing, citrination, imbibing, albification—aided by his diabolic preparations of

> Sal-tartre, alkaly and sal-preparat,
> And combust matirès, and coagulat ;
> Cley maad with hors and mannès heer, and oille
> Of tartre, alum, glas, berme, wort and argoille,
> Resalgar . . .
> Oure yngottès, testès, and many mo,

imposes on the ignorant and makes his profit of their greed. This conversation is in fact a

scathing exposure of the coarse impostors who disgraced the early career of science. The yeoman knows quite well that all the alchemist's craft and sleight will not bring the philosopher's stone or vital elixir to being, and he tells a tale to show by what cunning means another canon-alchemist deceives and fleeces a confiding priest. The tale is a heavy-handed satire, so crushing that we must needs believe that the poet's personal feelings were deeply stirred. It is possible that he himself had been a victim, the dupe of some attempt to repair his broken fortunes by some magic stroke, and that, excited by his indignation, he acted on impulse and introduced this new character because he could not easily attach the alchemist's fraud to any other of his pilgrims. The canon's yeoman's tale undoubtedly reveals an intimate acquaintance with the devious lore of alchemy ; it is also tinged with a bitterness foreign to the other tales, but wholly justifiable when we meet a reverend canon so steeped in vileness as this one was.

There is here another gap in the procession of tales, ere we find the pilgrims at " Bobbe-up-and-down," possibly Harbledown, " under the Blee " on the Canterbury Road. It is late in the afternoon, and the host is even more jovial than usual. The cook has fallen into the rear and is napping on his horse. " Fetch him here, and he shall tell a tale at once ! " But, alas, the cook is in no condition to tell a tale or even to talk intelligibly ;

me were levere slepe
Than the bestė galon wyn in Chepe,

he pleads ; and the manciple with ironical courtesy offers to fill his place. "I am sorry for you, sir Cook," he says ; "you look pale and dazed ; I fear you are indisposed and—fie ! your breath smells sour." In mad wrath the cook tries to answer the coarse taunts, but only falls headlong from the saddle and cannot pick himself up again. The host reproves the manciple with his easy tolerant philosophy.

But yet, Manciple, in feith thou art to nyce,
Thus openly repreve hym of his vice ;
Another day he wole, peráventure,
Reclaymė thee and bryngė thee to lure,—
I meene, he spekė wole of smalė thynges
As for to pynchen at thy rekenynges :
That were nat honeste, if it cam to preef.

Whereat the manciple makes peace by offering the cook another draught of wine from his own flask,

And of that drynke the Cook was wonder fayn,
And thankėd hym in swich wyse as he koude.

Strange company this for the "perfect gentle knight" and the coy and simple prioress, if not for Chaucer himself. And the manciple's tale is equally appropriate ; it is the fable of a tale-bearing crow from Ovid, and is in all respects one of the weakest and sourest of the whole set. It suited the cook, doubtless—if he heard it ; but it would not suit us. Its moral, how-

ever, is unexceptionable: "kepe wel thy tonge."

Now Canterbury is in sight, and ribaldry must hold his peace. All but the parson are supposed to have told their tales; the host insists that even he must not break the play; by his manner the priest must have something good to say: then, let him say it "by cokkes bones."

The good parson has been several times shocked during this pilgrimage. He now speaks up. "I will not tell fables or such dross. I will not sow tares when I have wheat in my wallet. Some virtuous matter, if you will listen, you may have—a simple exposition of a text, without hair-splitting. I will do what I can, and stand open to correction:

> But, trusteth wel, I am a southern man,
> I kan not geeste "*rum, ram ruf*," by lettre;
> Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre.

In other words, he is a plain Englishman who has no skill in either alliterative or riming verse; he can only tell his tale in prose. Every one agreed that it was right and proper to end in "som vertuous sentence." They heard the sermon without interruption, which is certainly creditable to them if they were awake. For it is indeed a prosy treatise on the Seven Deadly Sins, directed toward the central theme of repentance.

This is the end of the great work. What the pilgrims did at Canterbury—how they behaved

there, and on the return journey—this is written in the imagination of all those who have made their acquaintance, but not elsewhere. If the parson's dry tract is a representation of Chaucer's religious views, as it probably is, we may see him a reverent admirer of the older faith, yet profoundly touched by the straight evangelism of the reformers. He would purge the Church of its abuses, its hypocritical friars and fraudulent pardoners; but he never doubted its august position, its authority to control the conscience and the faith of men.

The parson's tale closes with a ceremonious farewell, in which "the makere of this Book taketh his Leve." In this he asks forgiveness of his "giltes" in making so many profane compositions, and humbly refers to his "Boece" and to his legends of the saints to show that he has not wholly lost sight of the salvation of his soul. The homilies of which he speaks in these retractions need not be sighed for; but a tear may be spared for the tales which were needed to complete the Canterbury scheme and which remained suspended in his fruitful imagination. As it is, the work runs to 18000 lines of verse, most of it of very high quality; whether it was weariness or death itself that stopped its career, the loss is that of something which no one else could supply. Admirers, imitators, followers he had, several of them quite worthy poets; but we could well spare all that they wrote for one more Canter-

bury tale of the quality of the clerk's or the pardoner's.

Nevertheless, what we have is a veritable cornucopia of poetry, astonishing in its variety, its abundance, its unfailing resource. The pilgrims themselves are a microcosm of mediæval society ; and their tales are with equal justice regarded as a microcosm of mediæval literature. Except the lyric, in which Chaucer did not excel, every form of literature current in his day is represented by a masterpiece : romance, legend, fabliau, fable, moral apologue, life of saints, homily—all are there in permanent guise. It is this successful treatment of such a varied programme of subjects that naturally impresses us first on a survey of the tales. Few poets in literature have so successfully satisfied at once the court and the cloister, the study and the market-place ; like a modern novelist, Chaucer appeals alike to the king on his throne and to the man in the street. A little education is now necessary to follow his language, and a little more to keep up with his learning ; but all that is essential in these tales can be appreciated and appraised by anyone who has read in that book of human nature which is always open around us. They have the many colours, the varied movement, the constant changefulness, of life itself.

Next to this truthfulness, the most prevalent flavour of the "Canterbury Tales" is their humour. This reveals itself at almost every turn. So omnipresent is it, that it may fairly

be described as the medium in which Chaucer's mind naturally worked. It is woven into every part of the work. In the portraits of the pilgrims, in the whole conception of some of the stories, it is obvious to the meanest intelligence. It is less obvious, but even more characteristic, in the thousand slight touches which denote at once an exquisite faculty of observation and an exquisite literary skill. Illustrations of this are abundant in the quotations of this section. It is as fine and subtle as Jane Austen's, but less ironical ; it is not surpassed by Shakespeare's, except in those regions of thought and feeling where "Hamlet" was conceived, regions which Chaucer did not attempt to explore. But Scott himself was not more kindly or tolerant, while he is far less delicate. It is true that propriety did not keep too severe a rein upon Chaucer's humour ; it is also true that when he was most coarse, his humour remained genuine ; but even when this element has been wholly subtracted from his work, the humour survives as clear and all-pervading as ever. The pathos which invariably resides with true humour is pure and unforced. Both tears and laughter are serenely human. The pity and the fun are not those of a superior being, looking down half contemptuously upon our foibles and weakness : they are the ready and spontaneous sympathy of an ordinary mortal, of one who has erred and endured like ourselves.

Our homage is due finally to the extraordinary

modernness of the "Canterbury Tales." When we read Chaucer's early poems, striking though some of them are, we do not feel this modernness of tone. We are clearly in a foreign air. But, their language apart, most of the "Canterbury Tales" are almost as agreeable to the present day as the "Idylls of the King"; it is no long step that is required to span the five hundred years between Chaucer and the tales of the "Earthly Paradise." That is, of course, only to say that, while Chaucer was true to the life of his time, he was also true to those eternal elements of human nature that belong to all time. He did not allow picturesque but ephemeral accidentals to eclipse the permanent essentials; in employing current conventions, he took care to be master of them and to keep them vital; he bent momentary fashion to the demands of enduring art. For this reason, the "Canterbury Tales" are the finest fruit of his genius. The best of them are among the greatest narrative poems in our own or any language. In none do we find a richer blend of wit and satire, of humour and seriousness, of splendid dramatic fitness, with that masterly literary finish, so simple to contemplate, so difficult to achieve, which is the glory of great poetry from the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" to Tennyson and Morris.

VII

THE last ten years of Chaucer's life we can only read with the aid of our imagination. The certain facts at our command are few. Probably they were busy years in the world of his poetry ; they were undoubtedly lean years in the direction of honour and finance. Some of the " Canterbury Tales "; possibly the poem of " Annelida and Arcite," previously mentioned ; certainly the treatise on the " Astrolabe " ; and a few minor poems, represent the harvest of a period of worldly distress.

The little book on the Astrolabe (1391) is a scientific treatise on astronomical measurements, interesting as an index of Chaucer's taste, but of no value on its own account. It was dedicated to his son Lewis, whose ability to " lerne sciences touching nombres and proporciouns " he dwells upon with obvious pride. He apologizes for writing a learned treatise in English instead of Latin, " for Latyn canst thou yit but small, my litel sone." Moreover, other treatises " somme of hem ben to harde to thy tendir age of x yere to conceive." This little preface, with its pleasant personal touches, is the most interesting part of the treatise to us. If Chaucer's little son of ten could understand the instructions therein given, he must have been an exceptional boy, we fancy. But perhaps he had been his father's companion during

some of his night watches, and had learned then to work the instrument.

King Richard II was friendly enough to Chaucer, but was so often in trouble himself that he could not be of much assistance to the poet. But in 1394 he granted him a new life-pension of £20 a year. In the previous year, living apparently at Greenwich in lonely straits, Chaucer addressed the following Envoi to his friend Henry Scogan, a fellow-poet who was living at Windsor, "at the stremès hede of grace."

ENVOI TO SCOGAN

To-broken been the statutes hye in hevene,
That crëat were eternally to dure,
Sith that I see the bryghtè goddès sevene
Mowe wepe and wayle, and passioun endure,
As may in erthe a mortaïe crëature.
Allas! fro whennès may this thing procede?
Of whiche errour I deye almost for drede.

By worde eterne whilom was it y-shape,
That fro the fiftè cercle,[1] in no manére,
Ne myghte a drope of terès doun eschape.
But now so wepeth Venus in hir spere,
That with hir terès she wol drenche us here.
Allas, Scogan! this is for thyn offence!
Thou causest this deluge of pestilence.

Hast thou not seyd in blaspheme of this goddès,
Through pride, or through thy gretè rekelnesse,
Swich thing as in the lawe of love forbode is?
That, for thy lady saw nat thy distresse,

[1] *I.e.* that in which Venus moves.

Therfor thou yave hir up at Michelmesse ?
Allas, Scogan ! of oldė folk ne yonge,
Was never erst Scogan blamėd for his tonge.

Thou drowe in scorn Cupide eek to recorde
Of thilkė rebel word that thou hast spoken,
For which he wol no lenger be thy lord.
And, Scogan, thogh his bowė be nat broken,
He wol nat with his arwės been y-wroken
On thee, ne me, ne noon of our figure ;
We shul of him have neyther hurte ne cure.

Now certės, frend, I drede of thyn unhappe,
Leste for thy gilte the wreche of love procede
On alle hem that ben hore and rounde of shape,
That ben so lykly folk in love to spede.
Than shul we for our labour han no mede ;
But wel I wot, thou wilt answere and seye,
" Loo, tholdė Grisel list to ryme and pleye ! "

Nay, Scogan, say not so, for I mexcuse,
God helpe me so ! in no ryme doutėlees,
Ne thynke I never of sleep to wake my muse,
That rusteth in my shethė stille in pees ;
While I was yong I put hir forth in prees ;
But al shal passėn that men prose or ryme,
Take every man his turne as for his tyme.

ENVOY

Scogan, that knelest at the stremės hede
Of grace, of alle honour, and worthynesse !
In thende of which streme I am dul as dede,
Forgete in solitarie wildernesse ;
Yet, Scogan, thenke on Tullius [1] kyndėnesse ;
Mynnė thy frend ther it may fructifye,
Far-wel, and lok thou never eft love defye.

[1] Cicero, who wrote a treatise on Friendship.

It is satisfactory to know that the pitiful postscript did not fail of its effect. Scogan acted the generous part, and the Queen no doubt added the weight of her influence to the petition.

Of the other minor poems of this period, we choose the Envoi to Bukton, a young friend of Chaucer's who was anxious to be married. Chaucer replies with the accompanying douche of cold experience. Adversity had not completely overwhelmed the creator of the Wife of Bath.

ENVOI TO BUKTON

THE COUNSEIL OF CHAUCER TOUCHING MARIAGE, WHICH WAS SENT TO BUKTON

My maister Bukton, whan of Criste our kyng
Was axėd, What is trouthe or sothfastnesse ?
He nat a word answerde to that axyng,
As who saith, "No man is al trewe," I gesse.
And therfor, thogh I hightė to expresse
The sorwe and wo that is in mariage,
I dar not wryte of hit no wikkednesse,
Lest I my-self falle eft in swich dotage.

I wol nat seyn how that hit is the cheyne
Of Sathanas, on which he gnaweth ever ;
But I dar seyn, were he out of his peyne,
As by his wille he wolde be boundė never.
But thilkė dotėd fool that eft hath lever
Y-cheynėd be than out of prison crepe,
God lete him never fro his wo dissever,
Ne no man him bewaylė thogh he wepe !

But yit, lest thou do worsė, tak a wyf ;
Bet is to wedde than brenne in worsė wyse,

But thou shalt have sorwe on thy flessh, thy lyf,
And ben thy wyvės thral, as seyn these wyse,
And if that holy writ may nat suffyse,
Experience shal thee techė, so may happe,
That thee were lever to be take in Fryse [1]
Than eft to falle of weddyng in the trappe.

ENVOY

This litel writ, proverbės, or figure
I sendė you, tak kepe of hit, I rede :
Unwys is he that can no wele endure.
If thou be siker, put thee nat in drede.
The Wyf of Bathe I pray yow that ye rede
Of this matérė that we have on honde.
God grauntė you your lyf frely to lede
In fredom ; for ful hard is to be bonde.

These envoys are evidently quite sincere and spontaneous effusions, answering to real emotions ; we need not suppose that the following balade is any the less so. It is one of several attempts in this form that survive to us among Chaucer's works.

TRUTH

BALADE DE BON CONSEYL

Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse
Suffice unto thy thyng though hit be smal ;
For hord hath hate and clymbyng tikelnesse,
Prees hath envye, and welė blent overal ;
Savour no more than thee bihovė shal ;

[1] In an expedition to Friesland in 1396 the Frisians refused to ransom their captured countrymen.

Werk wel thy-self, that other folk canst rede,
And trouthė shal delivere, it is no drede.

Tempest thee noght al crokėd to redresse
In trust of hir that turneth as a bal :
Greet restė stant in litel besynesse ;
An eek be war to sporne ageyn an al ;
Stryve noght, as doth the crokke with the wal.
Dauntė thy-self, that dauntest otherės dede,
And trouthė shall delivere, it is no drede.

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse,
The wrastling for this worlde axeth a fal.
Her nis non hoom, her nis but wildernesse.
Forth, pilgrim, forth ! Forth, beste, out of thy stal,
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al ;
Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede,
And trouthė shall delivere, it is no drede.

In his balade of "Lak of Stedfastnesse," he dwells upon the growth of fickleness and inconstancy in the characters of men ; its envoy is an exhortation to King Richard to

Shew forth thy swerd of castigacioun,
Dred God, do law, love trouthe and worthynesse,
And dryve thy folk ageyn to stedfastnesse.

Chaucer speaks the word of the friendly counsellor ; but he was unfortunately one of those ungracious pastors who "reck not their own rede," and as late as 1398 the King had to help him out of a seizure for debt by staying the execution. But the storm was soon to break upon the hapless Richard. He had tried the

national patience too far ; and when Henry of Lancaster returned in 1399 to claim his father's estates, the people flocked to his banner ; Richard was deposed ; and one of the first to welcome his successor was Chaucer. To Henry IV, a few days after his accession, our poet addressed the following lines, one of his last appeals to the Muses whom he had wooed so long.

THE COMPLEYNT OF CHAUCER TO HIS PURSE

To you, my purse, and to noon other wyght
Compleyne I, for ye be my lady dere !
I am so sory now that ye been light ;
For, certès, but ye make me hevy chere,
Me were as leef be leyd upon my bere,
For whiche unto your mercy thus I crye,—
Beth hevy ageyn, or ellès mot I dye !

Now voucheth sauf this day, or hit be nyght,
That I of you the blisful soun may here,
Or see your colour lyk the sonnè bright,
That of yelownesse haddè never pere.
Ye be my lyf ! ye be myn hertès stere !
Quene of comfort and of good companye !
Beth hevy ageyn, or ellès mot I dye.

Now, purse, that be to me my lyvès light
And savèour, as doun in this worlde here,
Out of this toun help me throgh your myght,
Syn that ye wole not been my tresorére ;
For I am shave as nye as is a frere.
But yet I pray unto your curtesye,
Beth hevy ageyn, or ellès mot I dye !

L'ENVOYE DE CHAUCER

O conquerour of Brutès Albioun,[1]
Which that by lyne and free eleccioun
Ben verray kyng, this song to you I sende,
And ye that mowen al myn harm amende,
Have mynde upon my supplicacioun !

This pathetically humorous appeal was at once successful. The son of John of Gaunt did not forget his father's protégé. Forty marks a year were added to Chaucer's pension, and placed him in comfortable circumstances. Tempted by this security, he promptly took the lease of a house in Westminster, which had fifty-three years to run. But he did not live out the first year of his new prosperity. He seems to have died in 1400, before he had enjoyed his pension for a full year. The day of his death is given as October 25, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey. This date comes to us from a memorial stone erected in 1556, which probably replaced an earlier one. His grave formed the nucleus for a series of memorials to our great poets in the famous poets' corner ; in 1900, a stained glass window was erected in St. Saviour's, Southwark, to celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of his death.

The facts of Chaucer's life, being drawn entirely from official records, would be tame enough reading if we could not hang them upon the prominent angles of his work. This, as will have been seen, we can do to some

[1] Brut, the mythical Trojan ancestor of British kings.

extent. The result is a portrait of singular attractiveness. None of our great poets is a more agreeable personality than Chaucer. He was apparently a bundle of contradictions. With his full ruddy countenance and his tendency to *embonpoint*, he was silent and contemplative, even to melancholy. With a decided leaning to highly flavoured stories, he combined a regard for religion and a love of philosophy, exceptionally deep and sincere. And this duality of temperament is reflected in almost every aspect of his work. While he was one of the pioneers of the Renaissance, he was steeped in the science of scholasticism ; a worshipper of Dante, he was a man of the world, and did not for instance turn classical stories to moral or religious ends ; an imitator of the graceful French and Italian poets, he was emphatically English and original ; but—again—though he loved and knew his England, the French wars never inspired him, and the social upheaval of his day finds faint echo in his verse. Though he satirized abuses in the Church, though he emancipated English literature from clerical control, he was no reformer and had no sympathy with Lollardry. The key to these elusive antinomies is of course his sense of humour. This made him a *whole* man—the voice, not of a party, not of a country merely, but of mankind. He saw life reflected as in a mirror of many facets—mysterious, perplexing, beautiful, sordid, serious, mean, refined, bestial, changeful, infinitely interesting : he

has shown us his vision, pronouncing no judgments and drawing no morals, but allowing the whole caravanserai to occupy his canvas and to speak for itself. And the essential truthfulness of his picture is patent to all. It may be that he does not often sound the divine chords that come from a Shakespeare or Milton, a Virgil or Dante ; it may be true that he has not trusted himself in the empyrean where he who is to poise himself securely must needs have an angel's wings ; and this doubtless reduces him, as Matthew Arnold argued, to a rank a little below the very highest. We must also take a point or two from him when we reflect on the slightness of his lyrical gift. But, this done, he remains supreme—supreme in narrative, supreme in satire, even after Dryden ; supreme in those felicities of diction which, opening up a world of character by a master touch, are the fruit of no mere imitation of Dantes and Boccaccios, but the flower of a most fertile genius.

GLOSSARY

[Words whose meanings can easily be judged from their modern equivalents are not as a rule given here.]

Able, fit, apt
Abrayde, awake, start
Abye, pay for
Achatours, buyers
Acloieth, acloyeth, hinders
Adamant, ironstone
Adrad, afraid
Agayn, ageyn, against, toward
A-go, gone away
A-gref, sorrowfully
Agroos, shuddered at
Al and som, every one
Algate, although
Algates, at any rate
Als, al-so, as
Amblere, an easy-paced horse
Amyddes, amidst
Anlaas, dagger
Apayed, pleased
Aperte, open, frank
Apertenant, belonging to
Arede, read, interpret
Argoille, argol, crude cream of tartar
Areste, arreste, delay, stop
Arives, embarkations
Ars-metric, arithmetic
Artow, art thou
Assoille, absolve
Assyse, assize
Asterte, start off, escape
At-after, after
Atones, at once
Atte, at the
Attempree, temperate
Auter, altar
Avauntour, boaster
Aventaille, front of a helmet
Aventure, chance, luck
Avouterye, adultery
Avys, deliberation
Avysement, deliberation
Awhaped, amazed, startled
Awreke, avenge
Ayen, again

Barbour, barber-surgeon
Barm, bosom
Batailled, with battlements
Bauderie, gaiety
Be, been (frequently)
Behette, promise
Bente, a grassy bank
Berdes, deceits
Bere, bear (vb.), bier (s.)
Bespreynt, sprinkled
Bet, better
Beth, be (imperative)
Bewrye, betray
Bi-bledde, covered with blood
Bid, pray
Bi-daffed, fooled
Bihove, advantage, profit
Bileve, belief
Bille, petition
Bi-sette, employed
Bit, byt, bids, asks
Blakeberyed, blackberrying
Blent, blinded
Bocher, butcher
Bode, foreboding
Boles, bulls
Bone, prayer, boon
Boste, boast, noise, fuss
Bourded, jested
Brede, breadth
Brenne, burn

Bresten, burst
Breyde, awake
Brotelnesse, brittleness, instability
Busk, bush
But if, if not

Careyne, carrion, corpse
Carl, churl, fellow
Carryk, ship of burden
Champartie, partnership
Chees, choose
Chevyssaunce, borrowing
Chirkyng, murmuring
Chyvachie, expedition
Citole, a kind of guitar
Clapers, burrows
Clappe, babble
Clepe, call
Cliven, cleave
Cloutes, cloths, clothes
Colera, colour
Condyse, conduits
Connes, coneys
Contek, strife
Coppe, cup
Corage, nature, disposition
Countour, auditor
Countretaille, counter-tally
Courtepy, short cape
Crulle, curly
Curteis, courteous

Dampned, condemned
Daswed, dazed
Daun, Dan, Lord, Master
Dayesye, daisy
Debonayre, debonair, gentle
Deel, part, bit
Delyvere, active
Demen, judge
Dere, v., injure
Deye, dairywoman
Dichen, dig
Diffyne, define, state clearly
Digne, worthy
Dispense, expenditure
Distreyne, constrain, vex
Do (*infin.* **doon**), do, make, cause to
Dom, doom, judgment
Donne, dun
Drecched, harassed
Dresse, prepare
Drowe, drew
Dyched, dug
Dyke, ditch

Eek, also
Eft, after
Eftsoones, immediately, afterward
Egre, eager, bitter
Embrouded, embroidered
Endelong, lengthwise
Engendred, produced
Engendrure, birth, generation
Engyned, put on the rack
Entremes, entremets, a "between-dish"
Entremeten, intervene, interpose
Envyned, supplied with wine
Erys, ears
Estres, interior of a house
Everich, every
Eyghen, eyes
Eyr, air

Facound, eloquent
Falsen, falsify
Fere, companion
Ferforth, far forward
Fern, of a long time
Ferre, farther
Ferthyng, little piece
Fetis, fetys, graceful

Fithele, fiddle
Flemed, exiled
Flete, float
Floytynge, fluting
Foon, foes
Foot-mantel, foot-cloth (to protect the skirt)
Fordo, destroy
Forleten, forgo, forsake
Formel, a hen bird of prey
Forpyned, tormented
Fors, force, matter
Forslewthen, delay slothfully
Fother, cartload
Foules, fowls, birds
Freten, devour
Fyn, fyne, end, finish

Gabbe, talk idly
Gaitrys, buckthorn-berries
Gan, began
Gat-tothed, goat-toothed
Gauren, gaze
Geere, dress, accoutrements, belongings
Geeste, story, tell stories
Gipser, pouch
Gleede, fire
Golee, mouthful
Goliardeys, ribald songs, ribaldry
Gonnen, began (pl.)
Graven, buried
Guerdonyng, reward
Gye, guide
Gyn, gin, trap
Gypon, a short vest
Gyse, guise, fashion

Habergeoun, coat of mail
Hals, neck
Halwes, holy places
Harre, hinge
Haunt, practice
Hele, health
Hent, hente, seized
Herbergage, lodging
Herberwe, harbour, inn, shelter
Heremyte, hermit
Heryen, praise
Herys, hairs
Heysugge, hedge-sparrow
Highte, was called, promised
Hoold, stronghold
Hoppesteres, hoppers, dancers

I-fere, together

Jakke, a fish ; or (possibly) a pudding
Janglere, gossip, prater
Juste, joust

Kan, know
Katapuce, the caper-spurge
Keep, heed
Knarre, knot
Koude, could, knew
Kynde, nature
Kythe, make known, reveal

Latoun, brass
Lawriol, laurel
Leche, leach, physician
Leefe, leve, dear, pleasant
Lemes, lights, gleams
Lemman, lover, sweetheart
Lere, learn, teach
Leste, pleased
Lesynges, lies
Lete, lette, hinder, let, forbid
Lette, hindrance
Leve, believe
Levere, more pleasant to
Lewed, ignorant
Leyser, leisure
List, pleases

Lith, lies, limb
Lore, lost
Lough, laughed
Lust, lustiheed, pleasure
Lynde, lime-tree
Lyte, little

Maistow, mayst thou
Make, mate
Manasynge, menacing
Maner, kind of
Meede, meadow, mead, reward
Mete, dream
Mette, met, dreamed
Mis-metre, scan falsely
Mo, more
Moot, mot, moten, must
Mowe, may
Muwe, mew, cage
Mynne, remember
Myster, craft, need

Nas, was not
Nempne, name
Nillyng, not willing
Nold, nolde, would not
Nome, taken
Nones, occasion
Noot, knows not
Nowthe, now
Nyhtertale, night-time
Nyltow, wilt thou not

O, oon, one
Orloge, dial, timepiece
Out-hees, hue and cry
Outridere, outrider, *i.e.* the steward of a manor belonging to an abbey
Overest, uppermost

Pace, go
Parde, par Dieu
Parementz, rich array
Pastee, pasty
Payen, pagan
Pees, peace
Pers, blue
Pervynke, periwinkle
Peyne, trouble, pain
Pies, magpies
Pleyn, full; to complain
Plyght, plucked
Povereste, poorest
Prees, press, crowd
Presen, to press
Prest, ready
Prikasour, rider
Priketh, rides, spurs
Prohemye, proem, introduction
Prow, profit
Pulled, plucked
Purveaunce, providence
Pyned, tortured

Quappe, flutter
Quite, requite, pay

Radde, advised
Raughte, reached
Ravyne, rapine, prey
Recche, reck, expound
Recchelees, reckless
Rede, advice, counsel
Redelees, foolish
Redoutynge, glorifying
Regalye, majesty
Renovelaunces, renewals
Rente, income
Resalgar, rat-bane, an arsenical compound
Rode, cross
Rood, rode
Rouned, rowned, whispered
Routhe, ruth, pity
Ruddok, robin

Rumbel, moaning wind, report

Sadde, steadfast, sedate
Sangwyn, blood-red
Sautrie, psaltery
Scathe, injury, harm
Scoleye, attend school
Seche, seek
Seeke, sick
Sendal, fine silk
Sentence, opinion, meaning
Servage, servitude
Seyn, say
Seyn, seyne, seen
Seynd, singed
Shende, harm
Shente, shamed, discomfited
Shepne, sheepfolds
Shirreve, sheriff
Shode, parting of the hair
Shoop, shaped, made
Siker, sure
Sith, since
Sittyngest, most fitting
Slawe, slain
Sleen, slay
Sleere, slayer
Soleyn, solitary
Somdel, somewhat
Soote, sooty, sote, sweet
Sope, sop
Sothe, truth
Sownynge, tending (to)
Speden, speed, prosper
Sperhawk, sparrow-hawk
Spores, spurs
Sporne, spurn
Stape, advanced
Stare, starling
Starf, died
Sterre, star
Sterve, die
Steven, voice
Stinte, stente, stint, cease
Streyte, straight, strict
Sweven, dream
Swich, such
Swogh, swoon
Swough, soughing of the wind
Swynken, toil, labour
Swythe, quickly
Syn, since

Tabard, short coat
Teene, grief, trouble
Tercel, male
The, thee, thrive
Thennes, thence
Tho, then
Thorpes, hamlets
Threete, threat
Throwe, short space of time
To-broken, broken up
Tonne, tun, cask
Toon, toes
To-rent, torn to pieces
Tretys, nicely made
Tryne, threefold
Twynne, separate into two

Unnethe, scarcely

Vavasour, landholder
Venerye, hunting
Veze, rush of wind
Viage, voyage, journey

Wawes, waves
Waymentynge, lamentation
Wemmelees, spotless
Wende, thought
Werre, war
Wexen, wax, grow
Whilom, once, formerly
Wiste, knew
Witen, know

Wlatsom, loathsome
Wone, wont, custom
Wone, dwell
Wood, mad
Woodnesse, madness
Woot, knows
Wre, cover
Wreke, wreche, avenge, vengeance
Wydwe, widow
Wyte, blame, punish

Y-, prefix to past participles
Yaf, gave
Y-bet, Y-bete, beaten
Y-corve, carved, cut
Ydelly, in vain
Y-do, done
Ye, eyes
Yede, went
Yerde, stick, rod
Yerne, eagerly, readily
Yeve, yif, give
Y-go, gone
Yit, yet, still
Y-lad, led
Y-nogh, enough
Y-nome, taken
Yore, long (time)
Y-purfiled, trimmed
Y-raft, seized
Y-ronne, run
Y-se, seen
Y-shove, shoved
Y-stent, ceased
Y-storve, dead
Y-wroken, avenged
Y-wys, certainly

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The following is a selection of books for further study of Chaucer:

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